Not Rated

Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

M/M

Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling

James Potter/Severus Snape

James Potter
Severus Snape
Lily Evans Potter
Sirius Black
Peter Pettigrew
Fleamont Potter
Remus Lupin
Original Male Character(s)
Original Female Character(s)
Eileen Prince

Alternate Universe
Young Severus Snape
Non-Canon Relationship
Severus is younger than the rest
Pre-Hogwarts
Hogwarts Era
Marauders Era (Harry Potter)
m-preg
Arranged Marriage
Alternate Universe - No Voldemort
Intersex
Mpreg
Threats of Rape/Non-Con

English

Recognition

magneticpulse

Summary:

The Princes have always been famous for producing male bearers. Male bearers were considered a gift from Lady Magic herself. Every child produced from a male was believed to be twice more powerful, which was why they were sought out.

Severus was the first male bearer in hundreds of years.

Notes:

I write for myself. This isn't a full-time thing. I only write because I have these plots running around my head for months.

Also, I apologize in advance if any pairings or concepts offend you. I suggest you don't continue reading this if you have anything against M/M pairings or Mpreg. I understand it's not for everyone.

Chapter 1 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/65878450) : Prologue

"I've never met you before, but I recognize this feeling"
-Lang Leav

Prologue

Eileen Aquila Prince, like her name, stood strong and courageous before her grandfather, Lord Prince. One mistake. One drunken, after-graduation mistake and it caused her this.

"You utter disgrace," hissed her grandfather. "You will be gone from this home by tonight. I do not have a granddaughter from this day forward. You are hereby disowned from the family, girl! Tainting a respectable blood with that of a filthy muggle..."

No, she would not let herself break and beg. She was taught better than that. She was strong and courageous, like her name.

"Father, please," begged her father. "I will take the blame, but do not throw my daughter out."

Lord Prince snapped his head to his only son and even in his old age, he was still as powerful as any of the Princes before him. "I am the Head of the Family and I will do as I please!" roared the Lord.

She brought this on herself. She knew that. Her father should not have begged. He was the one who taught her not to. *A Prince never begs, my light,* he said.

"Take this, Eileen," her father handed her a bag full of galleons, unshed tears in his eyes. Her mother was already crying. "I know it's not enough to last you and the baby but this is all the money we have right now. Father already forbade withdrawing from the vaults."

The baby. Yes, she will be having a baby. The first half-blood Prince. She thought about removing the child. Yes, she did. Would this one mistake be worth her disownment? Would one child be worth leaving all of her life behind?

"I love you so much, my little light. You are a strong, courageous lady. Never forget that. Wait for me, okay? When I become head, I will take you back in and the child. It is of no matter he or she is of muggle blood. I promise you that." Her father hugged her for the last time. She was due to leave in a few minutes, all her belongings already packed by the crying house-elves.

"Be strong, Eileen," whispered her distraught mother. "Your father and I are not ashamed of you. You will always be our daughter, always. Being your mother is the best thing in the world."

Yes, her child is worth it.

Chapter 2 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/66011707)

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_2_endnotes) .)

"You will recognize your own path when you come upon it, because you will suddenly have all the energy and imagination you will ever need."
- Jerry Gillies

Eileen sold much of her belongings, those that were not that significant. She needed the money. She didn't need her 2,000 galleon dress robes, nor her expensive earrings. Though her parents were able to discreetly give her enough to last her a year without work, it won't be enough. Eileen was smart. She knew she should not wait until her funds run out before looking for more.

She thought about reaching out to that muggle man, Tobias. It was his child anyway. Maybe she'd try tomorrow. First, she needed rest. Being two months pregnant wasn't difficult yet but with what she went through the past couple hours, she was exhausted.

Eileen apparated to Diagon Alley in the middle of the night. She was seventeen, fresh out of Hogwarts, carrying what was left of her belongings, and currently on her way to the Leaky Cauldron, the only place she could afford for the time being.

"Hello, kind sir, do you have a room available?" She asked meekly to the bar-keeper.

Tom smiled gently at the young lady and nodded, "That would be 5 galleons a night, miss."

Eileen handed him the money and went straight to her room. It wasn't what she was used to but it would do. Eileen needed it to be. She had no choice. Everywhere else she knew was too expensive.

She needed a plan. If things work out fine, she'd stay with the baby's father. But if not, Eileen thought about moving away altogether. Her grandfather, no, Atticus Prince was an influential man. If she'd stay in the British magical world, she'd have a hard time finding a job and a place to live. Lord Prince was a proud pureblood and the mere existence of the baby inside her womb was an abomination in his eyes.

Sleep came hard for Eileen that night. She wanted to cry and break down. Yet she didn't. She had no time to cry, not until she settle everything. It didn't matter that she had no one else aside from her parents whose hands were tied. She couldn't even be mad at them for being unable to protect her from being disinherited. They tried. Her father begged. They gave her their money and they loved her. With a chaotic mind, she drifted off to sleep.

It was quite common in their social circle to throw out someone like her, someone who tainted their precious blood with mud. She was lucky her parents still thought of her as their own. She was even lucky Lord Prince had not ordered her death. A few years ago, that would have been normal.

No matter. She needed to be strong now. For herself and for her unborn child.

The next morning, she went to the same pub she met Tobias. Eileen did not know the man's full name but she did remember him telling her he was a regular at the club. She hoped she would be able to get information from the people who worked there.

"Excuse me, may I inquire about a person? His name is Tobias and he told me he's a regular here," said Eileen to the man cleaning the tables.

"Tobias, eh? Whacha' need with him?" replied the man, wiping his hands on the clothe on wrapped around his waist.

"I need to know where he lives."

The man pointed at a direction. "Just down the other street, Spinner's End, behind the old factory."

Eileen bid her thanks and left to find the man who got her pregnant. Spinner's End wasn't far from the pub, and it was definitely not the nicest street in the area. The road and the sidewalks were muddy and even at early in the morning, the sky was filled with smoke and smog. There were a few houses that looked abandoned, an old children's playground, and the abandoned factory beside the creek. Behind the factory was a shabby two-storey edwardian house.

There he was. The father of her child.

Tobias was sitting on the porch stairs with a bottle in his hand and a cigarette between his fingers at such an early hour. If she had to guess, the man had probably been drinking all night.

Eileen was never one to judge based on appearance but from that moment she felt, no, she knew staying with the baby's father was not a good idea. She might be young but she knew she could do so much better than that.

She wanted her child to have a good life. Spinner's End won't give them that. And Tobias won't. Her child deserved more, Prince or not.

With a sigh, Eileen apparated back to Diagon Alley. It seemed like leaving the country was her next bet. She had roughly 50,000 galleons from her parents and 10,000 galleons from the stuff she sold. It was enough to get her far and get herself a place.

Eileen didn't bother stopping. As soon as she arrived back in her room, she grabbed all her belongings and left for the Ministry. She was no longer a Prince, technically no longer existing unless she applies for a new identification. Fortunately, it was easier to leave the country if one has no name. The officials assumed, and they were right, that she was another disowned child looking for a new place to live.

Eileen didn't know why she decided to head straight to Greece. The Americas would have been a better choice. She had cousins in the States. They had no distant relatives in Greece.

But maybe that was why she chose the place. Greece wasn't normally an option for someone who was looking for a place. There was a long-standing feud between the magical governments of Great Britain and Greece. Many purebloods prefer not to step inside the country at all.

Greece would be the best place to live in. There was no chance she'd bump into someone from her social circle, no one to condemn her for conceiving a half-blood, no one to condemn her child.

She arrived via international floo at the wizarding town of Nyropolis and immediately had her name changed to Eileen Petrelli. It was easy to change her name if she had no name.

She went out to scour the town end to end, street to street, building to building, from morning to afternoon, just to find a flat for sale. But because she had a distinctive British accent, the locals tend to judge her quickly. After all, British witches and wizards were notorious for their superiority complex and blood prejudice.

An old man who owned a grocery shop was kind enough to offer her a room above his shop. He said it was small and not the best one in town, but that did not matter for Eileen. She deemed herself lucky to even find a place to stay.

"What is your name, girl?" asked the kind man.

"Eileen, sir. Eileen Petrelli."

"Well then, Eileen, I need to warn you that the flat is not in its best condition. It has not been used for many years."

"As long as it is safe, sir, I do not mind. I really need the place," replied Eileen.

"None of that siring. Call me Marios," said the man.

Eileen knew better than to call him by his first name. While she was no longer a Prince and an aristocrat, she was taught to be respectful. To always be respectful.

She thanked the man immensely and surveyed the flat. It was small, that much was clear. Small and covered with dust. But it was enough. There was a mini-kitchen by the window, a living room that doubled as the dining room, a toilet and shower, and a single bedroom. Beige walls, yellow accents, one big window opening to a small balcony. It was a typical flat, nothing special. There were no furniture aside from a small table and a chair, a single dusty bed and an old closet.

With a soft smile, she straightened her back and began to clean. She hadn't brought much, most of her belongings were already exchanged for money. A flick of her wand here and there, and soon enough the dust were gone, the rooms, decent. In a matter of minutes, the flat was livable. On the walls were photographs of her and her parents, the only ones she brought with her.

The Prince elves were kind enough to pack her sheets and beddings. She didn't need to spend money on those anymore, but she did need to buy a few other things like toiletries, food, maybe even a small couch.

Tomorrow, she would go look for a job. Eileen was a smart and skillful witch, and willing to work with anything. She knew it would be difficult to find someone willing to hire a pregnant seventeen year old but she needed to try.

Nevertheless, It was high time for sleep. It was a very long and emotional day.

"It's just you and me now, little bean," whispered Eileen to her stomach, her hand covering protectively at the almost noticeable bump.

When everything was settled, the flat cleaned, her clothes folded and placed in the old rickety closet, the bed ready, Eileen finally let herself cry.

Eileen woke up even before the sun rose. Her eyes were puffy and red from crying herself to sleep last night.

No more tears, she thought.

After a long shower, she dressed herself nicely. She wanted to make a good impression.

Heading down, Eileen came across Marios. He was just opening his shop.

"Good Morning, sir." She greeted, instinctively curtsying.

The shop-keeper gave an exasperated sigh but then smiled warmly at the young woman. "I suppose I cannot make you call me Marios, then, eh? No matter. What are you doing out this early?"

"I am looking for a job, actually," replied Eileen.

Marios' eyebrows arched in interest. "What type of job are you looking for?"

"Anything decent."

"You are quite a lucky witch. My granddaughter who worked here had just moved back to Santorini. I have a job opening," said the man. "Basically, all you need to do is open the shop, man the counter, and close it at night."

She wasn't sure if she'd ever consider herself lucky but at that moment, she was undoubtedly glad to have crossed paths with the older man. Not only had he offered her a room, he also had a job open.

"I am very much willing if you'd take me. However, I think you should know of my pregnancy if you are serious about letting me apply for the job." At the end of the day, no employer would have welcomed with open arms a young, inexperienced, pregnant woman.

Marios hummed but didn't say anything for a minute. He stood there, outside the shop, in the early morning street of Sepolion, Nyropolis, thinking whether he should give the poor girl the job.

Marios was blessed with the ability to... feel people's aura, to put it simply. That was why out of all the locals who had available apartments to rent or sell, he was the only one to offer Eileen. He felt calmness in her, and light. There was something bright. And it was enough for him to trust her.

"When can you start?"

Severus Ariston Petrelli was born the 9th of January 1961.

He was special the moment he came into the world and not only because Eileen thought he was the most beautiful baby in the world but because of a very rare, almost extinct, very distinctive feature right between his tiny legs.

Severus was a bearer, the first one in 600 years or so. The healer who cleaned him fainted in shock. Eileen almost did, too.

Male bearers have a complete set of both male and female reproductive organs. The child would be desired by many. It was widely believed a male bearer can produce exceptionally magical children, not to mention male bearers were supposedly very attractive.

Eileen knew then that her son would need all the protection he can get. The last known bearer was a tale of tragedy. He was sought-after by powerful families and when he rejected a proposal, he was taken unwillingly. The dishonor was too much to bear and he took his own life.

That bearer was a Prince.

As once a Prince, she knew there was always the possibility of giving birth to a male bearer. It was in their blood. Lost for many years, but still flowing through their veins. Perhaps his muggle blood had woken the trait.

Eileen feared for Severus. In her panic, even after having gone through hours of labour, she managed to find the strength to obliviate the healer of the specific feature in her child. To everyone else's knowledge, Severus Ariston Petrelli was born as normal as any boy can be.

Only Eileen knew of Severus' rarity.

Notes:

A/N: I made "Ariston" his second name instead of Tobias because in this story Eileen never did consider the man as Severus' father. Ariston means "the best" in Greek. I think it fits him.

Chapter 3 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/66186451)

Notes:

Someone pointed out that this story reminds them of the song Rockabye by Clean Bandit. I definitely didn't base it on the song but it's an amazing coincidence! Thank you for that awesome observation!

lots of love,
newt.

(See the end of the chapter for more notes (#chapter_3_endnotes).)

"The first step in solving a problem is to recognize that it does exist."
-Zig Ziglar

Severus grew up a happy child.

His mother loved him very much. Even without a father, Severus never wanted for anything. Eileen did her best to provide for her son. From the small flat, they moved to a bigger one closer to the coast. From working as a helper in the small grocery shop, Eileen climbed her way until she was able to save enough to start her own business. A small café, catering not only witches and wizards but also muggles. They do not know Eileen was a witch. All the muggles know was that Eileen Petrelli was a wonderful baker. Her croissants were one of the best in town.

As a young boy living in the city, then the coast, there was always a friend around for Severus. He wasn't bullied, ostracized, judged, ridiculed, or shamed for anything. For not having two parents, for looking too much like a girl, for being from Britain, for anything. Severus had a happy childhood.

Nevertheless, Eileen never did let Severus play too long with other children, especially boys. When Severus was only four, back when they lived in the city, they had a neighbor who had a son a few years older. It was merely children's play but when Eileen found the boy kissing her son, she panicked and forbade any future interaction. Of course, Severus being as young as he was, didn't know why his mother made him stop playing with some of the kids. He asked, yes he did. But his mummy only told him he'll understand when he's older.

His mummy always says that. You will understand when you're older, sweetheart, she'd say. That's what she told him too when he asked that the second hole between his legs were.

That, and that it would be their little secret.

Severus understood secrets. They had a lot of those. His mummy told him of stories about his grandparents that he must never repeat to anyone else. They lived in a neighborhood where there are muggles, that he should never tell them they have magic. Secrets were okay.

Severus would be turning six in a few months. Eileen knew she cannot keep the secret any longer. Severus would need to be betrothed soon or else his safety will be compromised. A co-ed boarding school will be dangerous for an unattached bearer, and there really was no point in denying Severus was one. He was quite pretty for a boy, and unusually alluring, a characteristic all bearers have in common. As soon as anyone from the older generations, sees Severus, they will know. The school matron will know. The Purebloods will know. She silently hoped Greece wasn't as obsessed as the British were of keeping their bloodlines as strong as possible.

Severus deserved to know while he's young. He must understand how special he is, and that with his gift comes with caution.

On his birthday, decided Eileen. She will tell him on his birthday. Until then, she'd let Severus be a child.

Eileen was just about to close her quaint shop. It was almost sundown and she needed to fetch Severus from their neighbor. It wasn't usual that Severus was left in the care of others. Her son normally comes along to work, playing at the counter, or giving a hand in serving. Severus was young but he was quite a clever boy.

This time though, Severus chose to stay behind. Their neighbor had a new cat and Severus wanted to play with it. Their neighbor was kind enough to let him. Eileen hadn't felt the need to worry as their neighbors were mostly muggles. She always had a protective charm over her son and a beacon ward to let her know of his location at all times. Eileen might be a tad over-protective but when one has a child as special as Severus, no one can ever be that prepared.

It was beginning to get dark. Eileen hurried into closing the café. Severus would need dinner soon.

As she walked down the street, a loud bang suddenly echoed, startling Eileen and causing her to tumble. There were a few others who were as surprised as she was.

Eileen hadn't had enough time to comprehend the events when people started running. From the sight of a bright blue beam, Eileen immediately knew whoever caused the ruckus was a witch or wizard.

Then it happened. Eileen saw a man from afar erecting a shield to protect a small child of not yet ten years old. Without thinking, Eileen sent a reducto in the direction of those after them as two wizards were about to curse the pair.

The wizards were caught by surprise and had not anticipated another magical being in the area. The curse blasted a huge chunk of wall behind them and buried the wizards in debris.

The man immediately took the child in his arms and ran. Eileen ushered the two to a small alley.

"Merlin and Morgana! Thank you so much!" exclaimed the man. He was panting from running, his son crying in his arms, clutching tightly on his neck.

"I have a five-year-old son. I cannot imagine anything like that happening to him," replied Eileen. She took out one of the three sweets she was supposed to give Severus and handed it to the boy. "Here, you can share my little boy's sweets. A brave boy like you deserves a treat."

The child's eyes brightened and shyly took the candy from the woman's hand. "Thank you," said the boy between receding sobs.

The man sent her a thankful smile and mouthed a thank you. Without another word, he cast a Patronus in front of Eileen.

"We're safe. Send aurors right now. We're in a secluded alley in..." The man glanced at Eileen in question which she replied, "Herodou, right next to the inn."

As soon as the message was sent, the man placed his son back on the ground and held out his hand to shake the woman's. "My name is Alexios, and this is my son, Nikolaus."

She accepted the handshake and introduced herself. "Eileen Petrelli. Why were they after you?"

Alexios was initially surprised Eileen didn't know who he was. After all, who wouldn't recognize the name of a member of the Royal family? But considering the British accent coming from the woman's voice, it wasn't unexpected. Wizarding Greece was the only country left to be under the rule of a monarchy. The rest of the world had ministers and presidents. Add to the fact that Prince Alexios was not one to be normally written on the paper, there was not much reason for the migrant to recognize him.

He was about to tell her exactly who they were and that the wizards after them were most likely under the order of a traitor to the Royal Family, or there to kidnap them for ransom. They've been receiving threats for a while. But before he can even open his mouth, a loud blast erupted, startling them yet again.

They could hear yelling and curses flying from the streets. The Aurors must have arrived and dueled with the dangerous wizards.

Alexios pushed Eileen and Nikolaus behind his back and held his wand defensively, ready to strike if the need comes.

However, Alexios had not thought about the possibility that whoever would want to harm them may attack from behind. A crack of apparition echoed from behind them and Alexios hadn't had time to react when the bearded, bulky wizard instantly cast a curse towards them, specifically the boy.

"No!" screamed Eileen, instinctively stepping forward and pushing Nikolaus to the side to block the curse from hitting him. She, however, had not realized that in doing so, she was directly in line of the curse.

"Impedimenta!" cried Alexios, hitting the man right on the chest and blasting him on the wall, the bones in his body audibly cracking on impact.

Everything happened so quickly. Alexios dropped down to try and save Eileen who was bleeding badly on the ground. Nikolaus was wailing on his hands and knees as he stared at the woman that saved him.

It felt like hours before the Aurors found them when in fact it was not even more than a minute. The blasting curse pinpointed their direction and soon enough, Aurors were taking their Prince, his son, and Eileen's unconscious body directly to the hospital.

Prince Alexios desperately wanted the woman to survive. He remembered her saying she had a five-year-old son. If worse comes to shove, the boy would grow up without a mother. It was not something he would wish even to his worst enemies. His son lost his mother when he was only a year old and to imagine a young boy having to experience the same was heartbreaking.

He wanted her to survive. He needed to thank her greatly. If not for her, he might have lost Nikolaus.

The healers were doing everything they can to stop the curse from killing Eileen. It was meant to stop internal organs from functioning, subsequently killing their victim in a matter of minutes.

Nikolaus was also looked after, as was he, but Alexios refused to leave the room next to where their savior was treated. There was a glass between them, allowing him to see what was happening before things got worse and the healers closed the curtains apologetically.

He didn't know the woman aside from her name. He didn't know her son's name or her husband's. He didn't know where she lived or what she does. There was a lot of things she didn't know about Eileen, but one thing she did know was that the witch was kind, brave, and compassionate. It's not always that you find someone willing to help in their situation.

A few minutes later, when Nikolaus was finally sleeping, his brother, the Crown Prince, arrived with a worried and frantic expression.

"Alex!" exclaimed Crown Prince Andrew, coming up to pull his younger brother in a hug. "What happened? Is Niko alright?"

"Physically, he's fine. I am worried about the mental trauma. He saw Eileen bleed in front of him," muttered Alexios sadly, glancing at the form of his son sleeping on the hospital bed.

"How is she?"

"The last I heard, it's not looking good," sighed Alexios. He plopped down on the chair and placed his head on the palm of his hands. "Do you know anything about her? I know she has a son but that's it."

"I had a team look her up before I got here. She's from Great Britain but arrived with no name. We can't connect her to anything right now. She registered herself as Eileen Petrelli and had a son named Severus. She owns a small café right where you're found."

"No husband or anyone else?"

Andrew shook his head.

A knock came from the door. Alexios immediately got to his feet and prepared himself for whatever news he'd get.

"Sir, the healer is here to talk to you," announced the royal guard assigned.

"Let him in," ordered Alexios.

"Your Highness," greeted the healer with a tired expression he tried to hide.

"Is something wrong?" There was a huge pit in his stomach. The moment he asked the question, the healer's expression grew sad and regretful. He knew right then that whatever he had for him was not good.

Not good at all.

"...We did everything that we could but her body had completely shut down. I am deeply sorry for your loss. Is there anyone that we need to contact for her?"

Alexios slumped in defeat. He wanted to demand something more to be done but they already had the best healers in the case.

Yes, he did not know the woman personally, but she had saved them regardless. And that cause her her life.

"*Andrew*..." Alexios' voice hitched as he glanced towards his older brother. "She has a son."

The Crown Prince nodded solemnly. He understood why the boy was important for his brother. Niko had lost his mother too when he was a baby. It devastated Alexios. The fact that they now know young Severus Petrelli had no one else was a thorn in their hearts.

They would need to go get the child, inform him of what happened as best as they can, and go from there.

The Royal Family from that day forward vowed to protect the son of their hero.

Notes:

I really am sorry for killing Eileen in this story. It's actually one of the first few plots I started with. I know Eileen was a good mother in this and deserved to live but my imagination came up with this at 3 in the morning few months ago.

And I've also honestly planned she would get to save a prince of all people. I think it's ironic that she was born a Prince and died in the arms (well, not technically but still!) of a prince.

Chapter 4 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/66297512)

"The point is not that I don't recognize bad people when I see them — I grant you I may quite well be taken in by them — the point is that I know a good person when I see one."
— *Enid Blyton*

"Have you seen my mummy? She's not come get me yet. She missed supper and it's 'posed to be bedtime now."

Prince Alexios wanted to cry. The sight of the five-year-old asking for his mummy broke his heart. How was one supposed to tell a little boy his mother won't be coming home anymore. How was he supposed to tell the boy that his mother was dead. Dead because she saved another man's son instead of running away.

"Mister?" prompted the child. Severus was confused why there were suddenly many big men wanting to talk to Mrs. Baros, their neighbor. Mrs. Baros told him to go play outside while she talk to the other men. Severus didn't want to play anymore. He wanted to go home. His mummy was very very late tonight, it was almost his bedtime.

With all the courage he could find within himself, Alexios knelt in front of the boy sitting on the curb while his brother talk with the neighbor who was looking after Severus Petrelli. "Your mummy isn't coming anymore, little one."

Severus frowned, "Will she stay in the cafe tonight?" The child's voice was so innocent and sad that Alexios could no longer keep his tears at bay. He immediately took the boy in his arms and hugged the life out of him. A child should never have to lose his only parent at such a young age. And while he was more than grateful for Eileen Petrelli's heroism, her son, Severus, did not deserve loosing her for it.

Severus was even more confused and surprised when the tall cried and hugged him but he thought he was sad and needed the comfort. His mummy sometimes cries when things get too hard, and Severus would hug her and it would all be over.

"Why are you sad, mister?" asked Severus adorably, lightly patting the man's back in attempt of a comfort.

Alexios chuckled beside himself but it came out more as a sob. He released the boy from his grip and gently held him by the shoulders. "Did your mummy ever tell you about heaven?" He asked. It was the only way he could think of that may explain to the child what had happened.

Severus nodded, "Whiskers, that's my cat, went to heaven. Mummy said he won't be able to play with me anymore because he moved away."

"That's... well, your mummy had gone to heaven, too, little one." Alexios brushed the hair out of the boy's forehead in hopes it would soothe them both. He never wanted to have to deliver the news to the boy but it was the least he could do. He owed Eileen Petrelli everything.

"What do you mean?"

"It means she wont be coming back..."

Severus vehemently shook his head. "No, mummy won't move away without me. She says I'm her little treasure and that I am very special. She won't leave without me..."

The Prince sighed sadly. He wished it was the case but sometimes things go very wrong in a matter of seconds. He tilted the boy's chin up to meet his eyes. Severus was nearly crying but Alexios could see the small defiance in the child's eyes. He knew Severus understood what happened to his mother but didn't want to believe it.

"It's alright to cry, little one." At Alexios' reassurance, the dam broke and Severus wept and wailed, sitting on the curb on the street, outside their neighbor's house.

The prince took the boy back into his arms and let him cry. There really was nothing else he could do but that. He couldn't bring back his mother.

"She... didn't... even... say... goodbye..." cried Severus as he was wrapped in a tight hug.

Alexios didn't say anything to that. He didn't know what to say.

He had not noticed his brother coming over towards them. It was dark, and quiet aside from the soft sobbing of the five-year-old.

"Alex, Mrs. Baros is willing to look after the boy for the night," informed Andrew gently.

The Crown Prince was surprised when his brother shook his head and pulled Severus to his chest before standing up to meet his brother's eye. "He's coming home with us." Alex's voice was so firm that there was no sense in asking if he was sure.

It was a testament to Severus' exhaustion that the boy did not protest when he was cradled on some stranger's arms and carried to a car. He didn't even mind the unusual number of big men in uniforms surrounding them. All he knew at that very moment was that he was tired and he wanted his mummy. To have her cuddle him and tell him everything is going to be alright.

And if the man was being honest that his mother had gone to heaven, then his cuddles would have to do.

As the two princes and the small boy settled inside the family's Rolls-Royce, Alex realized that Severus had fallen asleep on his shoulders. The news must have been too much for the child, he thought.

"What have you found out?" Alexios asked after a short silence.

"The neighbors know as much as we do. If we are right that she was disowned, we cannot expect the British Ministry to answer our questions. I am quite unsure what shall happen to the child." Andrew glanced down at the sleeping boy on Alex's lap. Severus had tear stains on his flushed cheeks.

Andrew always looked after his younger brother after their mother died. Their father was too busy dealing with the country that they were all but left in the hands of their governess. The boy reminded him so much of Alex when they were children. So small and angelic.

Andrew already promised that they would do their best for Severus Petrelli. His father won't mind, and he doubt that he would even care. Andrew already stood as the leader of the country after his father contracted a blood disease about a year ago. If Alex goes through with what Andrew thinks his brother had in mind, he won't stand between them.

"He would be staying with us indefinitely, I assume?" questioned the older prince when Alex didn't say anything.

The younger prince sighed, "It's the least I can do for his mother. Until a family comes for him, he'll stay with Nikolaus and I."

Andrew nodded, already knowing his brother's answer. With a flick of his wand, he spoke as clear as day, "As of today, Severus Ariston Petrelli will be under the care of the Crown. So mote it be."

Alex looked at his brother in gratitude. While Severus would never be legally part of their family, he would be treated with the same respect. Nikolaus always wanted a little brother or sister, and it seemed his son just might get his wish.

"However," Andrew began. "You do understand that if a legitimate family member comes to take him, we will have to let Severus go."

Alex knew. While he wanted to take Severus as his own, it was not possible under their law for a Royal to legally adopt. And a part of him still hoped Severus still had a family out there somewhere. His father, an Aunt, or perhaps a grandparent. No young boy should ever be without family.

"Nikolaus, I'd like you to meet Severus." Alex placed his hand on Severus' shoulder. The child looked up to him timidly with red puffy eyes. He had just woken up when they arrived in the relatively modest, separate house within the palace property.

Niko, at 9 years old immediately recognized the name. His father and uncle had been discussing the son of the woman that saved him when they thought he was asleep. He understood the little boy didn't have both his parents anymore and his father and uncle promptly went to check on him.

The young prince regarded Severus with keen eyes. The little boy was very cute and adorable. He looked like a small, scared puppy. It made him want to protect Severus and be the big brother for him.

He crouched on his knee to level the younger boy and gave him a soft reassuring smile. "Hey, *bambino*, don't be scared."

Severus gave a small wave and hid his face behind the man's leg.

Niko suddenly remembered the toffee the lady gave him earlier and thought Severus would want one. He fished for the sweet on his pocket and held it on the palm of his hands.

At the sight of one unremarkable yet so familiar sweet, Severus gasped and stepped forward. "*Mummy*!" He cried out happily and accepted the wrapped candy. He didn't open it. The boy just hogged it like it was something very special. Alexios then realized the sweet was actually something Eileen usually gave her son.

"Severus will be staying with us now," informed Alex to Niko, which the older boy beamed to. He held out his hand for Severus to take, already planning to play with him the next day.

Alexios chuckled before putting a hand over his son's shoulder to stop him from wherever he was planning to take Severus to. "It's very late. Severus needs to rest, so should you. I'll take him to one of the guest rooms for now until we can set up a room for him."

"May he stay in my room tonight, father? I promise not to kick in my sleep!" pleaded Nikolaus.

Alex sighed but nodded, making his son cheer and Severus smile adorably, though if Alex had to guess, the child didn't even know what they're talking about.

Alex bent down to pick Severus up and carried him upstairs, Nikolaus still holding the boy's hand awkwardly.

When they arrived inside Niko's suite, the older boy immediately ran to get one of his stuffed toys to give Severus. Severus didn't bring any toys with him and Niko thought he might want to sleep with a teddy.

Of course, Severus happily accepted the stuffed bear and cuddled it to his chest. The adult was very glad Severus hadn't closed off completely, but he was also worried that the boy might have supressed his grief over his mother. He wasn't sure if it was right to take him to a mind healer. After all, when Nikolaus lost his mother, he was barely a year and a half. He didn't go through a grieving stage similar to what Severus might experience.

In any case, it was a problem for tomorrow. Tonight, they all needed rest. It was a hard day for all of them.

Smiling indulgingly, Alex ushered Niko to his bed and helped Severus crawl next to him. The bed was definitely big enough for both of them.

Alex leaned and brush his lips against his son's forehead before doing the same for Severus. "Goodnight, boys."

After Alex left the room, a small voice echoed through the darkness, "Nik'laus?"

Nikolaus rolled to his side and propped his head on his elbow, coming to face Severus who was already lying on his side, cuddling the stuffed bear he gave him.

"Yes, *bambi*?" Niko liked calling him a baby because in the nine-year-old's eyes, Severus was a basically one.

"Is heaven a good place?" Severus asked softly. Even in the dark, Nikolaus could see the glimmer in Severus' tired eyes.

"Father says so. My mother is in heaven too. Maybe your mother and my mother will become friends up there."

"Oh..." After a minute of silence between two young boys who lost their mothers, Severus sighed sadly. "I wish they didn't have to go."

"Me too... Your mother was a very brave person, Severus. She saved me from a bad man today, did you know? She's my hero."

"Really? She's my hero too!"

Nikolaus nodded perceptively. "You should be very proud of your mother, bambino."

Severus beamed and nodded enthusiastically. He really was proud of his mummy.

With that thought in mind, Severus finally succumbed to sleep which was quickly followed by Niko.

Severus settled in quite nicely in his new home.

He was cared for and adored by the princes, the housekeepers, gardeners, butlers... everyone. Who wouldn't when the boy was just too adorable for words?

Niko had began seeing him as his baby brother, loving the fact that he was no longer the youngest and only child in the house. It meant he actually had someone who looked up to him.

Alexios simply adored Severus. He was a very quiet child, never getting himself in trouble, respectful, curious, and unusually charming. He thought the child must have had a tiny bit of veela blood in him, but that theory was immediately scrapped. The ivory black hair was enough proof that he's not.

There were days, though, that Severus would ask when his mother would come and then immediately realizing that she won't be coming anymore. Those days, the boy would stay more quiet than usual, refused to eat, and sometimes would not leave his room.

It escalated when Eileen Petrelli's funeral day came. They purposely scheduled it more than a week after her death, more for Severus' sake. The boy was initially happy he could see his mother again but when he was told it would be the last time, he was vehemently refused to go. Severus thought that if he won't go see his mummy then it won't be the last.

It wasn't until Niko told him that his mother would be sad if Severus won't say his goodbyes that the boy reluctantly agreed.

Of course, during the funeral, not one of the attendees left without tears. The mere sight of the almost six-year-old reverently brushing his fingers on the sides of the coffin, sobbing and begging his mother to come back broke all their hearts.

Eileen Petrelli was buried with a complete military salute, no matter her original nationality, no matter her occupation, to honor her sacrifice and saving of the Greek Wizarding Royal Family. There were no media, no photo coverage, no other guests aside from the very few people Eileen was friends with. Marios was there, devastated by the death of the young woman he came to care for as his own grandchild. He, like all the other good friends of Eileen, was only glad Severus was in safe hands. It was really hard to watch the young child hugging the framed photo of his mother while they lower the coffin 6 feet underground.

The days after were a series of ups and downs, but everyone could see the small changes in Severus. The days before the funeral, he would stay in his room more times than he was out. After the funeral, he began to slowly come out of his shell, choosing to trail behind Nikolaus all day instead.

Days turned to weeks turned to months, and Severus finally adjusted to his knew life. They would find the little boy giggling and laughing more. He was constantly in the presence of one of the housekeepers or butlers as per order of Prince Alexios. Severus was a little prince without actually being one... or so they thought.

In the first few months that Severus lived with the new people, no one ever did find out about his condition. Severus was taught by his mother never to tell anyone about the thing between his legs, that no one else should see them. It was their little secret. And it was a secret he would likely take to his grave even though he had no idea why it needed to be a secret. He never let anyone else bath him or dress him. He always says he'd do it himself, rather insistent on it in fact. Alexios thought it might be something his mother taught him so he conceded yet also insisted to have someone wait outside the bathroom every time the boy bathes.

It worked. No one knew.

However, it was almost inevitable that someone would discover it sooner or later.

Barely a week after his sixth birthday, Severus developed a high fever, a bug he must have caught from one of Niko's friends who attended the celebration. Alexios was always the hands-on father which was why he chose to personally take care of Severus while he was sick. It proved fortunate as the second he removed the boy's clothes to change his soiled underpants when he had an accident, he found the one thing Eileen did everything to keep a secret.

And it was indeed fortunate. Not because Alexios planned to have Severus marry Nikolaus. No, he couldn't do that to his son and the little boy he thought of as his own.

It was fortunate because he knew how much protection Severus actually needed. While some parts of the world, like Greece, do not go to drastic measures just to wed a bearer, some societies do. The British Purebloods were one of them.

There was a very high chance that Eileen's old family was from the same society, if her possible disownment was taken into consideration. If they ever find out about Severus' condition, it won't matter if they actually cared for him, they *will* take the child away. It would bring prestige to their family name, whatever it was.

Alex won't have any of it. He would make sure no one else ever find out about Severus being a bearer. They would have to credit Severus' unusual charm and irrefutable beauty to luck if anyone ever start to question.

More than a thousand miles away, Atticus Prince was brought to St. Mungo's due to heart failure. He died before the day ended.

From that day forward, Augustus Prince was Head of the Prince family. And there was exactly one thing he yearned to do.

Chapter 5 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/66409597)

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_5_endnotes) .)

"You get what you wish for, but you may not recognize it"
— Steven Redhead

It would be exactly 6 months since Severus came to live with the prince and his son. They have come to love the little boy as family. In fact, Severus had started calling Alexios as papa, prompted by Nikolaus.

Alex delighted in the six-year-old's moniker for him. It was far from the "sir" and "mister" Severus started with. He did worry though that if a family comes to take him, no one would be safe from getting their hearts broken.

Nevertheless, Alexios won't distance himself and his son from the boy just because it may be temporary. Severus deserved to be cared for. Even if a family comes to take him, Alexios won't just forget about Severus and neither would Nikolaus.

To celebrate the occasion, Alexios decided to bring both Nikolaus and Severus on a holiday. They would be spending a week in Paris.

And since it was Severus' first time out of the country, the child was bursting with excitement. It made the older wizard smile. Even though Severus had adjusted well, he was still a timid, shy little boy who kept quiet most of the time unless actually spoken to. The sight of the boy bouncing on his feet with a toothy grin was one to behold.

"Settle down, Sev. The portkey will activate very soon," said an amused Alexios. Both boys were dressed like the little princes they were: navy blue vest for Severus and black vest for Nikolaus over a light blue dress shirt paired with black shorts, knee-high socks, and black leather shoes.

"Where we going again, papa?" asked Severus for the second time. He probably forgot he even asked earlier that morning.

"Paris, little one. Remember that photo of Niko in his room where there was a tall tower behind him? That's where we're headed." He would have liked to take them out farther, perhaps somewhere in Asia, but there was still danger lurking behind them. They might have caught the hit-men that had cornered Alexios and Nikolaus which killed Eileen Petrelli, but that's not to say others will try. They didn't even get to interrogate the wizards because as soon as they were taken into custody, they've all been poisoned to death.

It didn't matter for Severus. They would have taken him just to another island in Greece and he would still have been happy. His mummy didn't take him on holidays that much, and during the first months with the Royal Family, he wasn't allowed to leave the palace grounds for too long. Severus was only thankful Nikolaus won't be attending boarding school until he's 11 which was only a year and a half from now. If Niko's at school, Severus would be all alone in the big house.

"Okay, hold onto the teacup, boys," instructed Alexios, making sure Severus had done as he was told.

Ten seconds later, they all felt a tug on their navels before they whisked away across the Greek borders towards France. As soon as they landed, he heard a pathetic moan from beside him and saw a green-faced Severus. The onyx black eyes looked up to him with tearful eyes. Nikolaus was a pro with using Portkeys since they've been using it since he was a toddler. Severus never traveled through a portkey before.

"Are you alright, Sevy?" asked Nikolaus worriedly towards the younger boy.

Severus only nodded, scared that if he'd talk he might throw up altogether. Niko took a mint from his pocket and handed it to Severus.

"This would help," consoled the older boy. He didn't like seeing his brother in all but blood feeling sick.

It did help. Severus was back in his pale ivory coloring, cheeks flushed by the coolness of the French climate. He happily held onto Niko's right hand while they walk in front of Alexios out of the Ministry. Of course, they had the Royal Guards with them but neither boys seem to mind. They were well acquainted with the security, Nikolaus more than Severus which was understandable. Severus, though, was notably close to the Head of Security, Leon. They seem to have similar personalities: quiet, curious, and calculating.

Also, the guards not only protected them from further attacks but also to avoid any unwanted journalists taking photos of the trio. They still refused to have Severus be interviewed or plastered in the newspapers. No one aside from the Palace and Petrelli's personal friends knows about Severus. They did not want to give any money-grabbing relatives claiming Severus just so they can be close to the Royal Family.

Their first stop was straight to the hotel. Millénaire was only a 5-minute drive from the French Ministry. They already have a car waiting for them. Though they were wizards, if their destination was not too far away, Prince Alexios honestly preferred traveling by automobiles than apparating or flooing. In Greece, they did it because while the Wizarding World had separate laws from the Muggle Government, they were still required to attend events here and there. After all, they had titles even outside the magical world.

"Your Highness, *Bienvenue au Millénaire. J'espère que vous passerez une agréable journée en France* (welcome back to Millénaire. I hope you have a pleasant day in France)," greeted the head manager as he guided them up to the executive suites. Alexios was a good friend of the family who owned the hotel. Most of the staff had served the Greek Prince many times over the years.

"Merci, Jacques. Oh, and please do send Victor my regards," said Alex with a kind smile.

The manager, Jacques, nodded respectfully and left them to settle. If he wasn't informed that they would be bringing another child with them rather than it being only Prince Alexios and Prince Nikolaus, he would have been shocked. The little boy with them was one of the most adorable, beautiful child he had ever seen. He assumed the boy was a distant relative, not knowing about the incident six months ago.

Alexios ushered the boys inside the suite. He had called ahead to have them prepare two rooms for them: one for himself and another for the children, with two separate beds. Of course, their guards have their own rooms as well, but aside from the head of security, none would actually stay inside the suite.

"Father, are we having dinner at La Tour?" inquired Nikolaus.

"Of course," replied Alexios. "It is still very early so we still have time to visit Louvre before dinner."

"Louvre?" gasped Severus from beside Nikolaus. He had learned of the museum from one of Nikolaus' tales. The older boy told him it had the most beautiful paintings and sculptures in the world. At that age, everything colorful and big was an interesting sight.

"Yes, Severus. Come, I believe the car is waiting outside."

While Alexios, Nikolaus, and Severus enjoyed their holidays, across the seas, Augustus Prince was sitting in front of a Goblin in Gringotts.

It had been more than a month since he reinstated Eileen but magic seemed to disregard his wishes. His daughter's name was still burned out from the tapestry. He had tried owling her but all letters come back unopened.

As a last resort, Augustus decided to seek the help of Gringotts. They know much better regarding heirships and inheritances. They may have answers why he couldn't bring Eileen back to the family, subsequently, his grandchild whom he never met.

They would be the only family he had left apart from the distant relatives he had all over the world, and the only heir to the Prince name. His wife had died only two years after Eileen's disownment. It was especially hard for him knowing he couldn't inform his daughter of the tragedy she had every right to know. His father, Atticus Prince, never asked, never wondered, and didn't once care to ask about Eileen. If Atticus hadn't died naturally, Augustus might have just murdered him on his own. The old wizard was as prejudiced and terrible as they can get.

"Lord Prince, what can I do for you?" asked the goblin, Gorvurk.

"Are there other ways to reinstate a person in the family? My daughter was disowned seven years ago by my father and since he had perished, the House duties return to me. I would like to reinstate Eileen Prince."

Gorvuk contemplated and hummed, "There is no better way than using your oaths. You can also have her come here to Gringotts and re-sign the documents however, that's all formalities. If the magics had not allowed the intention, there are three possibilities. One, you are not the Head of the family; two, that person had lost their magic; or three, that person is dead. Obviously, option one is void as you are Lord Prince."

"Dead?" croaked the wizard. Augustus felt his skin turn clammy and blood drain. He didn't want to think of the possibility that his Eileen was dead. This wasn't the result he expected the second he walked through the doors of Gringotts. He wasn't and will never be ready to hear such possibility.

The goblin merely nodded. No one can really expect sympathy from them.

"If I may suggest, Lord Prince, we have a tracker available for a price. If you have any of her belongings with you, we can locate her quickly."

"Uh.. yes, of course... I have a pendant of hers with me all the time. Will this work?" He pulled out the silver necklace with an obsidian stone from under his robes.

"That will do just fine. I will be back." The goblin stepped out of the room without another word and came back in less than a minute carrying a scroll of parchment.

"The stone, please," ordered Gorvuk with a blank face.

Augustus immediately handed the stone to the goblin and watched as he place it in the middle of the parchment which actually was a version of a map.

The stone moved on its own, circling in its place over the map of England before going farther south, straight to Greece.

Greece. Eileen was in Greece. Augustus inwardly smiled at his daughter's choice. Greece would be the best place to escape. No one from their society ever consider Greece as a destination for holidays.

He had one problem, though. Wizarding Greece and Wizarding Britain had been in a long-time feud. Based on the history Augustus learned, a Minister and his companions disrespected the royal family during an ICW meeting more than a hundred years ago. That escalated to the disagreements they currently have about Pureblood ideologies and government systems.

No matter. Nothing will stop Augustus from heading first thing to Greece tomorrow. He would find his daughter and his grandchild and will bring them back home. Eileen couldn't be dead. She just can't.

King Andrew II had a busy day.

Technically, most of his days were busy. He had a country to run after all. Of course, he had advisors and the council to help him but everything still goes through him.

"Sir, an English man had just arrived in Greece to look for an Eileen Prince," one of the royal guards informed him just as he was about to head back to his office.

"Thank you, Jonas. Please direct him to my office right away." Andrew, like his father, chose not to be called 'Your Majesty' by his subordinates. He honestly preferred being called by his name but no one in their right minds would ever call their king, Andrew or Drew. Instead, they call him 'sir'.

Andrew instructed the International Affairs department that if someone comes looking for an Eileen, most probably someone from Britain, they inform him stat.

The timing was right. Alex and the boys were on a holiday in France which gives him time to assess the said man. He needed to make sure this Eileen Prince and Eileen Petrelli were one and the same, and that he would be suited to care for a young child. He'd leave the 'talk' to Alexios as it was his right as foster father of Severus.

A tall, impeccably dressed man with long grey hair tied at the nape of his neck was guided into Andrew's office. Andrew had no doubts this man was a British Pureblood. He had the family crest on his robes, a walking stick that wasn't actually used for aid, and the traditional long hair. He, however, did not strut like most purebloods Andrew comes to contact with.

"Your Majesty," greeted the man respectfully, faintly bowing his neck. Augustus was indeed surprised when he was informed that the King would like to see him.

Andrew nodded in acknowledgment and gestured for him to sit. "Tea?"

Augustus accepted the offered tea with gratitude but not drinking it straight up. Every Lord knows not to drink any offered tea without checking for poisoning. He didn't want to offend the king so he merely held it on his hand.

Andrew noticed the action but didn't comment on it. They were taught the same.

"What is your name, sir? You are looking for an Eileen Prince, if I am not mistaken?" inquired Andrew.

"Yes, Your Majesty. My name is Augustus Prince, and my daughter Eileen Prince was tracked by the goblins to your country."

"I know of an Eileen but I cannot be sure if she is the daughter you mean. Do you have any photographs or proof? I mean no offense, but this is a rather delicate matter for us." Andrew did not care to elaborate; at least not yet.

Lord Prince sort of expected something like this to happen, just not the person who asked. He had brought with him a photo of his daughter taken only a week before she was disowned. Augustus placed it on the desk for the king to take.

As soon as Andrew saw the photo, he barely suppressed a sigh. Now he had to inform the man that his daughter had been dead for six months.

"Lord Prince, I am deeply sorry to tell you that Eileen had died six months ago. She was caught between an ambush and got hit by a curse." Andrew chose not to dally with the information. No matter how he delivers the news, it will still hurt nonetheless. "But you should know that your daughter was a hero. You should be very proud of her."

Augustus was taught never to show emotion but the moment he heard "died" he couldn't stop the tears from escaping. It was like his world had come to a halt. He already lost his wife, now he was informed he lost his daughter as well.

"And the child?" asked Augustus in a small, shaky voice. Merlin help him if the child died as well.

"He is well taken care of, do not worry."

"He?" Augustus had not realized he wondered out loud. He didn't even know his grandchild was a boy... He missed so much, and arrived too late. If only he stood his ground against his father then Eileen might still be alive. He would have been in his grandson's life.

"Severus. His name is Severus. He just turned six," informed Andrew softly. He could see the anguish and hope in the eyes of the man before him. Anguish at his daughter's death and hope for the survival of his grandson.

"Where is he?" Augustus demanded without much strength as he would have liked.

"My brother took him and his son, my nephew, to a holiday in France. They won't be back until the day after tomorrow. I will have a hotel room prepared for you. This is the file on Severus and Eileen Petrelli, the name they used here." He handed Lord Prince a folder containing everything they have on the mother and son, which wasn't much to begin with.

"Thank you, Your Highness."

Augustus mechanically stood and bowed before being guided out the office by a royal guard. He was still distraught by the news that welcomed him. He knew the possibility of Eileen being dead was high but a father would never consider it. To have his fears confirmed was a nail to the coffin.

But his grandson was alive. He had a grandson. A part of Eileen living through a little boy.

Notes:

While I am multi-lingual, it does not include French so if I ever make a mistake with the translations, I apologize.

Chapter 6 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/66690043)

"Love is but the discovery of ourselves in others, and in delight in the recognition."
- Alexander Smith

Alex had not even unpacked yet when his brother sent a Patronus.

"See me in my office as soon as possible."

Andrew's tone wasn't urgent or frantic which was the only reason why Alexios didn't think of it too much. He did, however, follow his brother's command and headed straight to the King's home office which wasn't a very long journey considering the palace was only a five-minute walk from their revival style home which he had built himself when Nikolaus was still a baby.

He found his brother hunched over some documents, busy as always. Sometimes he thanked the gods he was the younger son. He wasn't the political type, and very much liked his current job as an engineer, both in the wizarding and muggle worlds.

"What have you got there?" Alex looked at the parchments curiously from where he was seated.

"Ah, Seth asked me to send his school records over to Cambridge. Something about joining a university club," muttered Andrew. Seth was his 18-year-old son, current Crown Prince of Wizarding Greece who was following the footsteps of his father and studying Politics and International Studies in the University of Cambridge. Politics was politics. It matters not that they had to learn it from muggles.

"How is Seth, by the way?" asked Alex, honestly interested to hear how his nephew was doing.

"Good, I believe. Misses his mother more than I'll ever be missed. Let's talk about him later. I have something you need to hear." Andrew closed the folder containing his son's records and took out another folder from his desk drawer. "An English Lord by the name of Augustus Prince arrived in Greece while you were in France. He was looking for his daughter, Eileen Prince who as I now know was disowned by his father 7 years ago. He had with him a photo and documents of his daughter."

Alexios abruptly stood and took the handed file from his brother knowing exactly what it meant for Severus. As he read through the remarkable detailed file on Eileen Aquila Prince, there was no doubt she and Eileen Petrelli were the same person.

"How did he react to the news?" inquired Alex. The news being that his daughter was dead.

Andrew peered at his brother for a second before sighing. "Like most British Lords, he didn't show much emotion though I could still remember the pain and anguish on his eyes."

Alex understood more than anyone. They weren't encouraged to show emotions as well; at least not publicly. When his wife had died, he had to resist breaking down in front of the healers. "And what of Severus?" He continued.

"He wants to meet him, possibly take him back to England. He's still here in Greece. We met again yesterday. Severus seems to be the only heir of a long line of an Ancient and Noble House, and the only family he had left," replied his brother. Augustus Prince was an interesting man and not one to spout nonsense about pureblood supremacy like some of his counterparts. Now that he knew Severus was indeed a half-blood, having Augustus unprejudiced was a start.

"I want to meet him first," demanded Alexios. The man might be the only family Severus had but that does not mean he was immediately capable of caring for a six-year-old; especially someone as special as Severus.

"I thought you might say that," smirked Andrew. "You are meeting him this afternoon at this café." His brother handed him a small piece of parchment.

"Alright." Alex pocketed the parchment after glancing at the location.

Prince Alexios thought he was early but when he arrived at the café, Augustus was already there.

"Lord Prince?"

Augustus immediately stood and bowed in respect, "Your Highness."

Alexios motioned for him to sit as he, too, sat opposite of the man, his head of security, Leon, seating only a table away.

"I assume my brother told you I have temporary custody of Severus?" asked Alex softly. This man in front of him raised a daughter like Eileen. He quite deserved the respect.

"He did, Your Highness," replied Augustus in a strained voice. The King also told him Severus was close to the prince and his son. It worried Augustus that Severus might not want to come with him.

"You may call me Alexios, Lord Prince. After all, I consider your grandson as a son."

"Then you must call me Augustus."

"Alright, Augustus. I asked for a meeting with you before letting you see Severus for a few reasons." Alexios tapped his finger on the cloth-covered table. "First, it may not be my place but how is it you only tried to look for your daughter and grandchild recently?"

Augustus expected the questions but he also thought the King would have told him why. Nevertheless, he felt like he owed the prince an answer. "My father was a vicious man. He would have had Eileen and Severus ruined or worse, killed eventually if they stayed in England. I think Eileen knew that. It was only when he died a month ago that I finally had the chance to search for them. It seems I was too late."

Alexios nodded at the man in solidarity. He couldn't fully blame him for fearing his father, but personally, if it happened to Niko, he'd get himself disowned as well just so he can be with his son. Still, Augustus looked so regretful, it won't help if he blame him more.

"I see... and what is your plan now?"

"I'd like to take my grandson back home," replied Augustus honestly. "He's the only family I have left. If I didn't do all I could for my daughter, at least I'll have the chance with her son."

"That's admirable, Augustus, but what do you really plan with Severus? Is he just a means to continue your name? I do not mean to be blunt or offensive, I just want to be sure. Severus is a dear not only to me and my son but also to a lot of people in the palace." Alexios didn't want to hurt Augustus Prince but it's better than taking him at face value and ending up with an unloved child in a huge manor.

Augustus vehemently shook his head. "No! No, nothing like that. I confess, Severus is indeed the only direct heir to the Prince name but that's not why I want to take him home. No, Severus is my grandson and he would be treated like one. I've always wanted more children but I could not father another. When Eileen told us she was pregnant, I was ecstatic to be a grandfather only to have her cast out the day after."

Augustus didn't know why he had to explain to a Greek Prince. Severus was his grandson. By blood rights, he could actually take Severus back to England forcefully; not that he'd ever do that. Augustus supposed he just felt guilty for not being around in his grandson's life in the first place.

"I will take you up on that," said Alexios gently, finally deciding he was good enough to be around Severus. "I do have one request, please let us stay in Severus' life even if he leaves for England. We have a family home near Cambridge, so we will be able to visit frequently."

"That is of no issue. I do not think the boy would like to be separated from your family permanently. I have been told that he calls you '*papa*'."

Alexios nodded with a fond smile. "He does. My son, Nikolaus, made him call me that last Christmas. He knows I am not his father, and that he's only staying with us temporarily." He felt he needed to add the last statement in case Augustus thought he was setting Severus up for pain.

Severus would still be in pain from the separation, but at least they'd get to visit him as often as they'd like.

"I am very thankful you have taken my grandson in."

"It's the least I could do. She died protecting my son, and with that I vowed to protect hers as well." Alexios spoke with great dedication. "Speaking of protection..."

Alexios was silent for a minute that Augustus almost urged him to go on. The prince continued, though his voice was a bit more guarded this time. "There is something you must know of Severus before you take him to England. It is vital information thus I refuse to divulge it carelessly. I need you to swear an oath not to use this information by any means other than the utmost safety and happiness of Severus."

Augustus was indeed curious what got the prince so guarded. He was fine with taking an oath for his grandson's well-being. He was a little offended that Alexios would think he'd ever use Severus for undesirable deeds.

The English man took out his wand from the holster, not noticing the Royal Guard a few feet from them tense at the action.

"I, Augustus Atticus Prince, vow not to use any information provided today by any means other than the utmost safety and happiness of Severus Ariston Petrelli, soon to be Prince." Augustus made sure to use the prince's words as verbatim as possible and not forgetting to add the fact that Severus would change his name from Petrelli to Prince as soon as possible.

Alexios accepted the vow with a flick of his wand. He had it set that if Augustus ever broke the vow, the prince will be notified. Unlike Unbreakable Vows, it will not harm the wizard more than a simple unconsciousness for 48 hours.

"Thank you," said Alexios in relief. "I believe you are familiar with the rarity of carriers?"

Augustus blinked in surprise, nodding once absentmindedly. Of course he knew about carriers. The Princes were famous for them after all. A flicker of understanding flashed on the older man's eyes as he gaped at the prince before him.

"You mean... Severus... *Is he*?"

Alexios bowed in confirmation. "No one knows but I. Even my brother does not."

Augustus sat dumbstruck for a minute.

"And... you want a contract for your son?" asked Augustus apprehensively. It's not that he didn't trust the prince or the younger prince to care for his grandson but he just found out he had a grandson. He wasn't ready to give him away yet. Betrothals were very common in their society. Most of the pureblood children were already promised even before their actual birth. Because of Severus's ancestry, Augustus thought he wouldn't have to prepare a contract for his grandson this soon. It would not matter if Severus was half-blood anymore. Many purebloods will consider the boy a treasure they would want their children, or Merlin-forbid, for themselves to covet, to breed, to show-off at galas and dinners.

"By the gods, no!" Alexios raised a hand and shook it dismissively. "My son sees Severus too much like a brother, and we do not practice early arranged marriages. I would not do that to Nikolaus and Severus as our parents before us did not do the same for me and my brother."

Augustus' relief was visible as his shoulders were relaxed once more. Though, the thought of Severus having the Greek Royal Wizarding family as in-laws were appealing, it would mean Severus would have to stay in Greece. That wasn't something Augustus was open to yet. And he can't just leave England altogether as well. He was a Lord and he had a responsibility not only in the family but also to the Wizengamot.

Alexios continued when he realized Augustus had nothing to say for the moment. "I know of the myth regarding carriers and I cannot fully say I believe any of it. Believe it or not, the Greeks have known of it since the gods' time. Even the muggles know of it. You call it a bearer or carrier. They call it intersexuality, a term coined by a British muggle, in fact. But we originally know of it as hermaphroditism, from Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite who merged bodies with a naiad and possessed both male and female qualities. As far as I know, in the muggle world, it is uncommon for two organs to fully develop. Severus being magical made the quality even rarer as magic will allow Severus to develop them.

I want you to understand that this is not something that should be detested nor desired and lusted. It simply just is. Severus may be able to carry children or father them but no proof was ever given that they produce them exceptionally gifted.

The point is, I don't want to ever hear Severus being married off to the richest heir that offered. You may be his grandfather and I may be just his foster parent, but make no mistake, I promised your daughter I will protect Severus to the best of my abilities. I intend to follow it through, with the Royal family behind me."

Augustus was completely befuddled hearing the prince's opinion and threat. He felt like a little child being scolded and talked down to. The worst part was he was guilty of Alexios' accusations. No, he wasn't about to have Severus married off to the richest heir that offered but he did have thought about getting the boy betrothed earlier. He didn't even know the muggles have the gift. They always believed it was a gift from Lady Magic herself.

He wanted to snarl and demand to be talked to with respect. He was a Lord. He was a *Prince*.

Then again, Alexios was a Prince too. A *real* Royal Prince at that. What was a mere noble to someone of direct Royal blood?

"I... I understand."

Alexios smiled brightly and clapped his hand together. "Good. Now, would you like to meet your grandson?"

If there was one thing he was grateful of, it was that his grandson was indeed loved and protected.

"Severus?" Alexios called loudly through the empty room.

A muffled sound echoed in reply but no words were clear. Alexios allowed a smile to grace his lips knowing where the boy had hidden himself again. He strode closer to the connected walk-in-closet that doubled as Severus's mini potions laboratory. The wizard allowed the boy his hobby as long as Severus didn't use any real ingredients. Severus received a children's potions kit on his birthday from one of his mother's friends and was extremely into it.

"Hello papa," greeted the boy distractedly. The small figure was hunched over a tiny desk, pouring blue-colored liquid into vials.

"What have you got there?" asked Alexios fondly, sitting on the wooden bench that came with the closet.

"I'm making a cooling potion," informed the 6-year-old seriously. He held the filled vial to the prince proudly. "See? I added ice cubes on it because ice is cold. Oh, and mint, too! Mint feels cold.. like ice."

"Is that what turned it blue, then?" Alexios didn't mind indulging the boy of his passion.

Severus giggled behind his hand. "Silly. No, Lena said cooling potions were blue. She turned the water blue for me!" Lena was their cook, and apparently, Severus's own apothecary as well.

"I see. I am sure it is the most potent cooling potion there is." The prince patted Severus on the head and silently motioned for him to sit next to him on the bench.

"There's someone who wants to meet you, Sev," said Alexios carefully.

Severus stared at the prince in curiosity and an unexpected small flicker of understanding in his eyes. He didn't say anything though. He waited for the wizard to continue.

"His name is Augustus Prince. He's your grandfather."

"Grandfather? He's here?" Severus was a little apprehensive but excited. His mum always talked about his grandfather, not that Severus knew the man's name. He only knew of him as grandfather.

"Yes. He's downstairs. Do you know him? Did your mum tell you about him?" Alexios was surprised Severus didn't look scared at meeting someone new. He felt so foolish for not asking the boy himself if he knew any family other than his mother all these months. They just assumed a 5-year-old would divulge the information freely, forgetting how secretive Severus was.

"Mummy said no tell," replied Severus with a quiet yet final voice.

"You don't have to tell me all of it, Severus," assured Alex and placed a comforting hand on the boy's shoulder.

Severus still shook his head. Secrets weren't meant to be shared.

Alexios sighed. The boy really was one so loyal. "I just want to know if your mother says good things about him."

Deciding the information wasn't technically him diverging the stories, Severus nodded. "Mummy says good things."

That visibly relaxed the prince. If Eileen told Severus that Augustus Prince was a good man, then the boy's mother might not be against the Lord taking care of her son.

"Well, are you ready to meet him?"

Severus nodded nervously, taking the hand offered to him and walked with the prince out of his mini-potions laboratory. He was worried his grandfather won't like him. From the stories his mum told him, his grandfather was an esteemed potioneer. Young as he was, Severus knew for a fact that he loved making potions. He wanted to be like his grandfather even though he had never met him yet. In his deep thoughts, Severus had not noticed they were already in the man's presence.

The moment Augustus saw Severus, he fell in love at first sight. Severus had all of Eileen's qualities. He had her cheekbones, her lips, her nose, Merlin, he even had her furrowed brows when she's thinking about something. He recognized at that moment the protective instinct he lost all those years ago.

Alexios tapped on Severus's shoulder when he noticed the boy wasn't paying attention.

"Huh?" Severus shook his head when he felt the tap and looked up to Alexios. Alexios then gestured for him to glance forward.

The prince had not yet introduced them yet but the moment Severus saw Augustus Prince's face, the flicker of recognition sparked on his face.

"Grandfather?" gasped Severus softly that if one wasn't attentive, it would have been missed completely. His eyes were shining with both joy and edginess.

Augustus offered the boy a warm, genuine smile. "Yes, indeed. Hello, Severus."

Severus's legs twitched as if he wanted to move closer to the older wizard. It did not go unnoticed by the two wizards. Instead, Severus glanced back to Alexios, unsure of what he should do.

"You are right, Severus. This is Augustus Atticus Prince, your grandfather." Alexios finally introduced.

Severus bowed respectfully despite his instincts to run and hug the man he only heard of from his mum. "Hello, sir. My name is Severus Ariston Petrelli. It is nice to meet you." Nikolaus did taught him well how to introduce himself to people.

Augustus, disregarding the decades worth of proper decorum, knelt on the ground and open his arms for the boy to barrel in. This boy was his first and only grandson.

It was the only sign Severus needed to finally let himself go with his instincts. In seconds, he was wrapped in the man's strong arms. Severus though his grandfather smelled like coffee and rain. It was surprisingly calming.

It didn't matter that it was basically the first time Severus saw his grandfather. He knew in his heart that he was family.

Chapter 7 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/66870988)

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_7_endnotes) .)

"Kindness is more important than wisdom, and the recognition of this is the beginning of wisdom."
- Theodore Isaac Rubin

"Why don't you both sit down while we wait for the refreshments?" Alexios ushered Severus to the settee while he and Augustus took an armchair each.

Severus sat with his small legs swinging slightly, both feet unable to reach the floor. It wasn't typical for Severus to fidget. He was always a well-behaved child but being around someone that he's been hearing of since he was younger was about as exciting as meeting a mythological creature. He was giddy.

The ice-cold fruit juices and a cup of Greek tea for Augustus came a few minutes later. Lena, ever the great cook, included the almond cookies Severus loved.

Alexios and Severus conversed for a little bit, talking about what he did for the day. Nikolaus was out with a friend—a son of his father's colleague. He would have taken Severus with him but the younger boy was too tired to play outside especially since they had just come from a trip. That left Severus alone for a whole afternoon immersed in his potions kit. The boy didn't seem to mind at all as he went on and on about the stuff he did in his room.

Noticing the other man simply listening to their discussion, Alexios thought Augustus might want to spend some time alone with his grandson.

"I will leave you two to get to know each other. Severus, will you be fine?" Alexios asked the boy softly. While he did not want to leave Severus alone with someone the boy just met, never mind that it's his grandfather, his presence would only agitate Augustus. The aristocrat may not show it but Alex knew Augustus found him intimidating.

"Yes, papa. I'll be fine," replied the boy with a smile.

With that, Alexios nodded his head towards the older man and strolled out of the room, casting Severus a final glance only to see him already beaming at Augustus. He shouldn't feel jealous of the boy's apparent fondness of Augustus. He was

his grandfather, after all. But he can't help but feel saddened that it may actually mean the little boy won't stay with them any longer.

When Alexios was out of sight, Augustus finally breathed in relief. The Prince was nowhere near a big, hulking man. He didn't even look that physically strong but he had a formidable aura in him that made Augustus be wary of every action he made in front of Severus.

Severus, despite his grandfather's obvious tenseness, simply felt happy with the unfolding events. "Is grandmother coming too?" asked Severus excitedly.

Augustus looked at Severus with a pained expression. "No, Severus. Your grandmother is no longer around."

That instantly paused Severus. The brows creased for the second time since he saw the boy. "Oh. Is she with mummy, then?"

The grandfather leaned over and patted his knobby knee comfortingly. "She is."

Severus, to Augustus's astonishment, only smiled sadly. "Mummy has her mummy with her now. She won't be lonely. She also has Niko's mummy as a friend too. Niko is my brother but not really my brother, did you know?"

A child's mind simply was refreshing, though Augustus, for them not to dwell too much on the hardships in life. Just as they should be.

"Oh, I know. Is Nikolaus a very good brother to you?" asked Augustus with a gentle smile.

Severus nodded extensively. "He's very good. He lets me play in his room all the time and we walk around the courtyard looking for pretty stones. Too bad he's going to school very soon." Severus sported a frown at the thought. He didn't want to be alone in the big house even if he had all the staff and guards to keep him company when his papa goes to work.

"Do you not have other friends here?" Augustus was definitely curious what his grandson had been doing in such a protected residence. As far as he saw from the visits he had in the King's home office which was not much, to begin with, there were no other children in the palace.

"I played with other kids at the park near the house but papa said I couldn't stay there anymore. There was Heron, Chris and Sophie and... I forgot her name but I think it starts with an F." Severus shrugged, feeling a little guilty for not remembering his old playmates' names. "Niko is my friend here. His other friends don't really talk to me much but I only met them two times. But it's okay because I have Leon and Lena. Oh, and Niko's Aunt Asteria is always fun. I haven't met his cousin Seth yet. He goes to a muggle school far away."

Augustus let the boy ramble on, honestly pleased that Severus wasn't nervous or reticent around him. He was worried Severus would stop talking altogether when Alexios stepped out of the sitting room.

He was also downhearted that his grandson didn't have many stable friends. He did understand Alexios' reticence in letting Severus continue playing with the other children in the said park. From what he's told, Eileen and Severus stayed on the other side of the country near the coast. It was too far for the boy to travel to all the time.

And there's also the fact that Severus was taken in by the Royal Family which means he can't simply go to a closer park and befriend just about anyone.

Nevertheless, Severus seemed to be okay with not having a lot of friends. The boy was simply glad to have someone to play with. It didn't matter if they were 40 years his senior or an intimidating, scary-looking Royal Guard.

No matter. As soon as they return to England, Augustus would introduce Severus to his long-time friend and business partner's son. He was well aware Fleamont won't look down on Severus' blood status. The Potters may be pureblood

themselves but they were part of the few families who weren't prejudiced about it and actually had a few cousins who married muggleborns and half-bloods.

"Do not fret lad, I have a friend who has a son only a year older than you. When we return to England, I will introduce you to him. He's a good kid."

"England?" Severus wasn't sure he heard it right. His grandfather said they were returning to England. Severus had never been to England before and didn't understand why he was returning to it.

"Of course. Where else would our home be?" Augustus saw the turmoil in his grandson's expression and realized he had not told him that detail yet.

Cursing himself, Augustus moved to sit next to him and took Severus's small hand in his, giving it a light pat. "Do you not want to come with me, child?" He would bring Severus to England no matter what the child would say but what he had to say may change their schedule for a bit. If Severus ever said no, Augustus would stay in Greece for the time being and try to convince him otherwise.

"I'd like to but... I don't want to leave Niko and papa and everyone else." Severus cast his eyes downward, his eyes starting to wet with tears. He forgot about all the leaving. His papa told him before that he might have to go if a relative comes to take him, but he also promised they will always come for a visit wherever Severus was in the world.

And his grandfather was exactly how his mum described him. He really liked his grandfather.

Still, he didn't want to move. He already had his own potions lab in his room. He didn't want to leave that behind. Papa and Niko would be very sad if he goes. Severus would be very sad too.

"Listen, Severus. I know you like it here very much and it's hard to leave all this behind but our home is in Prince Manor. Alexios already had me promise to let them visit frequently. Nikolaus would be starting boarding school soon, am I correct? Just think of it as you going to a separate boarding school. You'll still see everyone whenever you want to."

"But... But what about mummy? She's here. I won't get to visit her anymore." Severus was already crying softly by then.

Augustus conjured a handkerchief and gently wiped the boy's tears. "We'll bring your mummy with you. She's going to stay with your grandmother in the family mausoleum where she should be." The grandfather hated seeing the boy cry. He wished things would have been easier for Severus.

"Okay," sniffled Severus. "But not yet, please. I want to say goodbye to everyone."

"Take all the time that you need, lad." Augustus would gladly stay for another week or two in the foreign land as long as at the end of it all, Severus would join him back home. He freely admits he was being selfish for taking Severus away yet he cannot bring himself to change his mind.

It didn't matter if he wasn't born there. Severus's place was in England like all the Princes before him. Augustus was quite sure that Severus would come to love Prince Manor. They had a garden and lawn almost as big as the one in the palace. He'd even set up a whole mini-laboratory for him since he now knows how much the boy liked potions.

"But father!" whined Nikolaus unhappily. "Why does he have to go?"

Alexios should have expected his son to react as negatively, even more than Severus. Nikolaus was very protective of his baby brother and when Alexios informed him that Severus' grandfather had come to take him to England, Nikolaus was anything but happy.

"You know this, Nikolaus. Severus has his own family. Do not worry, we'll still visit him frequently," consoled Alex. He, too, was distraught that Severus would finally move away. No matter how much he had prepared himself, the thought of not having the little boy welcome him home from work was difficult. Nikolaus would start school the next year which means the prince won't have both boys trashing the house anymore.

"What if he gets scared or have a nightmare? Who will cuddle him back to sleep?" Niko was almost in tears.

"I'm sure his grandfather will be there for Severus, son. And he always has the stuffed bear you gave him the first night he was here."

"Do you promise we'll visit him all the time?" asked Nikolaus dejectedly.

Alexios drew his son in a side-hug. "Of course." He'd visit every week if he could.

Augustus and Severus wouldn't leave for another week. Severus intended to say goodbye to everyone in the palace individually. He also wanted to spend the last few days with his papa and Nikolaus, just the three of them. Alexios was glad he took the boys on a trip before everything happened. Half a year wasn't a long time but it was enough to get attached to the little raven.

When the final day came, Severus had tears in his eyes as he clutched on the stuffed toy Nikolaus gave him. His stuff was already packed and shrunk inside Augustus' pocket.

Alexios pulled the 6-year-old in a tight hug, "There now, Severus. It's not really goodbye after all."

"I will miss you so much, papa," sobbed the boy in his arms.

"I will miss you too, little one." Alexios brushed Severus' hair off his face and planted a soft kiss on his forehead. "We'll see you very soon, alright?"

Severus nodded sadly. As soon as Alexios pulled away from the hug, Nikolaus tackled Severus in one of his own.

"You be careful, okay, Bambino? And don't run around so much. I won't be there to patch your knees again. If you have a nightmare, Mr. Bear will protect you in my place." Nikolaus really does take his job as a big brother very seriously. He may be only four years older but that does not mean he's not old enough to protect Severus.

Nikolaus felt Severus nod and sob with his face buried on the young prince's chest, the stuffed bear crushed between them.

"Promise you'll visit?" pleaded Severus.

"I Promise."

The tearful goodbye ended when their international floo schedule was called. Severus had his small hand tightly clutched on Augustus's larger hand as he tearfully waved goodbye to Nikolaus and Alexios. At the very last step, Severus suddenly let go of Augustus, ran back straight into his papa and brother's arms, and whispered the one thing he always wanted to tell them yet never did before.

"I love you."

Alexios couldn't help but smile through his broken heart. "We love you too, Severus. Very much. Take care of yourself, okay?" He kissed him longingly on the top of his silky black hair and carried him back to Augustus who was both happy at the prospect of returning to their home and sad at having to separate Severus from his foster family.

Instead of putting Severus back on the ground, Augustus perched the 6-year-old on his hip and drew the boy's head on his shoulders.

The older wizard shook Prince Alexios' hand. "Thank you so much, Alexios. Await my owl. As soon as everything is settled in the manor, come by for tea. You and your family will always be welcome in my home."

Alexios nodded gratefully. Though they do not typically visit Wizarding Britain, they had a valid reason to do that now.

Augustus stepped inside the floo, cradling Severus closely, not minding the fact that the boy was already heavy enough to hurt his arms.

With a final glance and nod towards the International Transportation employee, the grandfather and grandson duo whisked away across the ocean.

When they landed right into Prince Manor's drawing room, Severus was clutching tightly on his neck. He's told Severus was used to flooing but international floos tend to get a little more erratic than domestic ones.

"Are you alright little one?" asked Augustus with concern while he spell the soot off their clothes.

"Y-yes, grandfather," replied Severus He slowly wiggled off the man's arms, signaling he wanted to be put down.

Augustus immediately understood the request and placed Severus on the floor. The boy began walking towards the vastness of the room with curiosity. He looked so much like a little lord taking in the intricately painted walls, valuable antiques, and flashy furniture, all while he had a stuffed toy dangling from his left hand.

Augustus watched Severus gently brush his finger over the furniture, occasionally nodding to himself. He couldn't hold off a smile from forming on his face when the boy patted the settee as if to check it was soft enough for his bum. Severus pulled himself up to sit on it and smiled, proving it indeed was to his taste. He glanced at Augustus and said, "I like it."

Augustus strolled closer with an amused expression. "I see that. I am glad you find it adequate and I hope you'll find your room quite as satisfying."

During the week when Severus spent saying his very long goodbyes to his foster family, Augustus had called a house elf and instructed them to set up the boy's rooms. He also made sure to have them prepare a connecting mini-potions laboratory, a special gift Augustus was excited to show his grandson.

Severus gave Augustus a toothy grin and hopped off gracefully from the settee. Augustus placed a hand on the boy's shoulder as he guided him up towards the added rooms, occasionally briefing Severus of the different rooms and areas they've passed including the Lord's Study, the Ballroom, Reception Room, School Room, and Library.

"Now this is your room. Mine is just across yours so if you ever need anything, I will be very nearby." Augustus opened the double door, revealing a beautiful platinum grey walls, a solid navy blue ceiling that matched the color of the wooden bed frame, and wooden planks as flooring. All of Severus's books and toys (and then some) were already organized on shelves and chests.

It was a room out of a child's dream. Augustus thought Severus might like the colors of the ocean as he used to live near the coast. He was well aware he was spoiling his grandson but he believed Severus deserved it and more. Of the short time Augustus knew Severus, he saw how sweet and kind the boy truly was.

Severus gasped from beside him and did exactly what he had done earlier in the drawing room. The young heir regarded his new room full of awe. "Thank you, grandfather. It is beautiful."

"Wait until you see what's behind that door." Augustus teased Severus with a smile, pointing at a similarly solid navy blue door in between two shelves. The grandfather flicked his wand and unlocked the room.

As soon as Severus stepped inside, the boy squealed happily. He had his very own potions laboratory complete with a tiny working table, a desk, shelves of unbreakable jars, and children's books on potion-making. What Severus didn't know was that Augustus had a ward placed in the room that would notify him if ever the boy was in. He also had it specially warded so that no actual fire or magic can be cast inside the room. He wanted his grandson to enjoy his passion but at the same time, stay as safe as possible. He did, however, promise himself to teach Severus the art. He was proud that the boy he only met had the same love of potions as he did.

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" Severus wrapped his little arms around Augustus's legs, beaming up at him.

"I am glad you like it, Severus. Now, it's almost time for supper. The house-elves should be done preparing."

Severus peered curiously, "What's a house elf?"

Augustus placed his hand at the back of the child's head and steered him out of the room. Severus didn't know house elves because Greek Wizarding families do not normally have them. Even the Royal Family didn't have house-elves.

"House-elves do work around the manor: cooking, cleaning, gardening... Many families in the wizarding world have them. I will introduce them tomorrow. For now, let's head to the dining room."

Severus wanted to ask more questions but his tummy rumbled as if telling the boy that food comes first.

The two entered the huge dining room. A small feast was already prepared on the table as Augustus ushered Severus into a booster seat.

The boy had impeccable table manners for his age partly due to the fact that he lived in a palace for months and also because Eileen was always the proper lady regardless of what occurred 7 years ago.

Augustus wiped his mouth with a napkin before getting Severus's attention. "A good friend will be visiting along with his son this weekend. Are you up for meeting new people?"

"I don't mind, grandfather. Niko taught me how to greet people properly. And papa says I'm getting very good with socializing now." The pride in the little boy's voice was evident.

"Yes, quite indeed," Augustus agreed with a chuckle.

Notes:

The Greek wizarding world in this story do not usually have house elves but they do hire squibs, wizards and witches. Of course, there are some that do but Severus had never lived with one before.

Chapter 8 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/67001218)

"It's not exactly love at first sight. It is more like soul recognition."
- Lynetter Simeone

Severus did love Prince Manor just as Augustus expected. How could the boy not when the manor was catered to his desires? Augustus was truly spoiling his grandson. Even the house-elves had doted on the young Prince heir. They always adored Eileen and after knowing their Little Master was their Mistress's son, the elves were all too happy to make Severus as happy and comfortable as possible.

However, it did not mean Augustus was trying to turn Severus into a brat. He made sure that Severus understood respect, humility, and obedience. Augustus was certain his grandson wasn't one to be unruly. The boy, unlike other

children, preferred quiet tasks like reading and coloring. He sometimes enjoyed playing in the vast manor grounds but mostly preferred indoors.

Augustus did lay out a few rules for Severus the second day they were in England. He was not to leave the manor grounds without supervision— not that he could, given how well-protected the property was. He was not allowed inside the Lord's Study unless given permission. He must clean up after himself and not rely everything on house-elves. He was not to lie or talk back disrespectfully. Other rules include a 2:00 nap and an 8:00 bedtime, and three full healthy meals a day.

There was one rule, however, that Severus didn't need to be told twice: No one should be allowed to know about the thing between his legs.

At first, Severus was confused when his grandfather brought up the issue regarding the boy's status as a carrier. He didn't know what a carrier was but when Augustus mentioned the special part between his legs, Severus was shocked. His mum told him no one else should ever know because it was their secret.

Augustus, however, quickly told Severus that he and Alexios knew and that he was right that it was to be kept a secret. However, he also made sure Severus understood why. Severus, at only six years old, was informed of the basics of reproduction. Augustus had no qualms about explaining it to his grandson as his late wife explained it to Eileen the same way when she was around Severus's age.

"But what does that have to do with me, Grandfather?" asked Severus with wide eyes. His mummy never told him all of these before not knowing Eileen actually planned to inform him after his birthday.

"While it is girls who are capable of carrying children, you are a very special child Severus. When you are older, you will also be capable of carrying a child should you wish to. That is why you have that second hole."

Severus's eyebrows rose in surprise. "B-but... I am a boy. *Am I*?" The question came out as a whisper.

Augustus knelt in front of his grandson and grasped his shoulders. "I want you to remember this, Severus, you can be whoever you want to be. If you see yourself as a boy, then you are a boy."

Severus sighed in relief. He was a boy all his life; he didn't know how to be a girl. "I'm a boy, Grandfather," said Severus with finality.

Augustus smiled and ruffled Severus's hair.

"But why do I have to keep it a secret?" asked Severus after a moment.

"Because some people will take advantage of your ability, Severus. In our history and society, it is widely believed that carriers are capable of producing very powerful heirs. Many will want you to marry their sons." Augustus refused to add that some would want to marry the boy themselves.

Severus shook his head vigorously, eyes almost wet with tears. "I don't want to marry anyone, Grandfather! I'm still very little!"

Augustus pulled Severus in a hug. "There, now, lad. You won't be marrying anyone against your wish. I promise you, if it does ever come, I will make sure you have a say in it."

If it was anyone else, they would not have done the same thing. Most Lords would have quickly arranged a contract with the wealthiest, most powerful family. But Augustus made a promise not only to Prince Alexios but also to Eileen and Severus. He will never make the mistake his father did. He would place his family first before anything— money and power were invaluable.

That was enough for Severus. He didn't mind keeping it a secret especially now that he knew that if other people know, he might get married.

The rest of the week passed by rather uneventful. Severus spent his days exploring the manor under the watchful eyes of the house-elves. Augustus was glad all portraits go into the now-locked gallery as he wouldn't worry about Severus getting screamed at for being a half-blood.

Augustus also planned on hiring a tutor for Severus. He would be taught the duties of a Lord, proper pureblood etiquette, reading, writing, mathematics, and even history. He was still on the process of writing an ad for the Daily Prophet when the floo chimed.

"Gus? Are you there?" Fleamont's voice echoed through the study.

Augustus quickly strolled to the fireplace and gently knelt, meeting the flamed face of his friend.

"Yes, are you coming through?" He asked.

"In a minute. James wanted to know if he should bring his broom play with Severus." The amusement was evident in Fleamont's expression.

Augustus bit back a smile. "Perhaps not. Severus prefers his feet firmly on the ground. "

That made Fleamont laugh. "Well, there goes the already shrunken broom in his pocket." He said. "Alright, we'll be there in 5 minutes."

Augustus stepped back and waited by the fireplace. "Linny!" He called.

A house-elf dressed in black robes with the Prince crest on it popped into view. "Yes, Master Prince?"

"Please inform Severus that the guests will be arriving soon and I shall await for him in my study," instructed Augustus.

The elf bowed and popped away. It wasn't long until the floo blazed and Fleamont stepped out of the fireplace. James arrived a few seconds later.

"Augustus," smiled Fleamont as he grasped the man's hand firmly. "You do not have any idea how shocked I am to have received your owl last week informing me you were out of the country and officially became a grandfather."

The smile then turned into a frown. "I am very sorry about Eileen. She was a dear girl, my goddaughter. Such a tragedy."

"Indeed," agreed Augustus with a grim expression. "It was something I never thought would happen."

Fleamont only nodded. He too had not believed it at first when he received his friend's letter.

"Anyway," said Augustus, glancing at the young boy next to Fleamont. "It is a pleasure to see you again, James."

"Hi Uncle Gus." James greeted with a grin before looking around the study. "Where is he?"

"Severus, you mean?" asked Augustus with a smile.

James nodded cheerfully. When his father told him his Uncle had a grandson who would be living with him now, James wanted to meet him. All his cousins were already grown-ups so he didn't have anyone to play with. Sure he had playdates with some pureblood kids sometimes but they felt more like a tea service than actual playing.

James didn't have to wait long because a knock caught their attention. Augustus flicked the door open revealing a small boy with smooth raven hair that reached below his ear, dressed in a navy blue playsuit.

"Severus, come here," called Augustus. Severus followed the command and came to stand next to his grandfather.

"Fleamont, James, I want you to meet my grandson, Severus Ariston Prince. Severus, this is my good friend and colleague, Fleamont Potter and his son, James."

Severus did a small bow and shook both their hands like how Nikolaus taught him. "It is nice to meet you."

It earned him a chuckle from Fleamont. "Such a well-mannered child. It is a pleasure to finally meet you as well, young Severus."

Severus knows a compliment when it is given so he replied a small 'thank you'. He did, however, notice that the other boy was staring at him for a while.

James, on the other hand, had not realized he'd been staring. It was hard not to, if he was honest. He didn't know why he couldn't take his eyes off Severus. Severus had eyes like the night sky. His hair looked very soft and silky that James felt conscious of his messy locks. And when he smiled, James felt his tummy flutter.

Maybe it was the floo, he thought.

James was only shaken out of his stupor when his father placed a hand on his shoulder as he guided him towards the couch.

Severus sat next to Augustus on one couch while James sat next to Fleamont on the opposite. Tea was being served and the adults were engaged in a conversation about the Malfoy heir's betrothal to Cygnus Black's youngest daughter.

Both boys were quiet, merely listening to the ongoing conversation without actually understanding most of it; Severus because he did not know much of the Pureblood traditions and James because he was too busy trying not to stare at Severus.

"Severus, why don't you show James your room? We'll have a house-elf call you for lunch." Augustus said. He wanted Severus to make friends but also wanted the children out of hearing as he and Fleamont continue their discussions.

"Okay," replied Severus and hopped off the couch. He glanced towards James and smiled, "Do you want to see my room? I have my own potions lab!"

James quickly nodded and both boys quickly bid goodbye to their father/grandfather. He wasn't really interested in potions like his father but listening to the adults talking was boring.

James followed Severus through hallways and the stairs into a double-door room.

"This is my room," announced Severus proudly. "Grandfather said he had it made for me."

"It's nice," commented James honestly. "You really like Blue, don't you?"

Severus grinned. "Yes. We used to live near the ocean. It was beautiful."

James studied the room some more. There were a lot of toys but unlike his own room, Severus's room was much more organized and clean. Severus must really like books because he had a whole shelf of it. When he glanced to the younger boy, Severus was already sitting on the carpeted floor forming train tracks.

"Do you need help?" offered James. He was beginning to feel more relaxed around Severus and his chest no longer felt like popping.

Severus beamed at him, "Yes, please."

James sat opposite Severus and helped him form the tracks. Soon enough, both boys were laughing and giggling as they played train conductors, the potions laboratory completely forgotten. James didn't usually play with toys like trains since he preferred flying on his broom but his father told him Severus didn't like flying. James thought he could sacrifice a day for his new friend.

In the middle of their game, James suddenly thought of something. "Dad said you were not born here. Is that why you talk funny?"

"I don't talk funny," refuted Severus with a small glare that James thought was adorable.

"Yes, you do. You don't sound like us. Well, you do a little but not fully."

"Does it matter what I sound like?" asked Severus seriously.

James shook his head. "I suppose it doesn't. Just weird is all. I've never had a friend from outside of Britain."

"I'm your friend?" Severus's eyes widened at the thought.

"Of course, you are. I mean, you want to be my friend, right?" James voice hitched a little at the end. He really, really wanted to be Severus's friend.

Severus grinned. "Okay. I'm your friend, now."

James grinned at him in reply before they went back to playing with the trains.

Meanwhile, in the study, Augustus and Fleamont were in a serious discussion. Augustus didn't trust many people, especially within their circle. One of those exceptions was Fleamont Potter who had been his friend since they were first years, sharing a dorm in Ravenclaw.

Augustus was confident in his trust towards his friend enough to be willing to confide in him about Severus's condition. As much as he would have liked to keep it himself, he needed all the help that he could get. Sure, he had Prince Alexios behind him but the man was thousands of miles away.

"Alright, out with it," drawled Fleamont.

"What do you mean?" Augustus arched his eyebrow.

"You obviously have something to say," replied his friend. "Does it have anything to do with Severus? You seem concerned when you instructed him to his room earlier."

Augustus sighed. "What I am about to tell you requires strict confidence, Fleamont. If this goes out to the public, it will be messy."

"Oh? Is there anything I can do to help?"

"No... not at the moment, at least. I guess I just need someone I trust to talk to," said Augustus.

"Okay then. Do not worry, I won't even tell my wife." Fleamont meant it. If it was important to Augustus that the information be kept between themselves then he was agreeable.

So Augustus told him about Severus being a carrier including all the other things he learned about them. He told his friend his reservation for arranging a contract for his grandson. He told him about the vow he made with the Prince of Wizarding Greece. And he told him about his fears that Severus may end up like the last carrier.

Fleamont never expected it would be something like this. Indeed, Severus would be such a prize in their society. His blood status won't matter anymore as people would put his capability as a sign of ultimate pureblood pedigree. It irked both wizards but it was something they had no control over. Fleamont had a better upbringing than Augustus as Atticus Prince was an epitome of a Pureblood supremacist. It was only because of Fleamont's influence that saved Augustus from turning out like a snotty, wealthy, megalomaniac lord.

However, unlike Augustus, Fleamont thought Severus should be betrothed as soon as possible. If the gift does come to light, Severus would be bombarded with unwanted attention. That unwanted attention will only become worse if Severus is unattached. It doesn't have to be a blood or magic binding contract. There were contracts that would allow the boy to void the engagement should he choose when he comes of age. It wasn't commonly used as most parents did not want their children to suddenly get out of a politically and financially favorable marriage. It was the same contract he planned for James when the time comes, perhaps before he goes to Hogwarts.

Still, it was Augustus's choice. He did understand his friend's reluctance. It wasn't only that Augustus had promised against using Severus as a pawn (basically) but he also felt guilty for not doing enough for Eileen. Fleamont knew Augustus was reflecting his guilt towards his grandson which was why the wizard did everything to make things right regardless of a long-time culture or practice.

"How do you plan to hide it when the boy goes to Hogwarts? He will be in a dorm full of other boys, Augustus," said Fleamont with concern.

"Severus knows not to shower or simply undress in the presence of anyone else, male or female. And it won't be noticeable unless he shows it himself. In any case, I will try to brew a glamour potion for him," answered Augustus.

"If it does come out, at least you won't have that Malfoy boy asking for his hand anymore. Abraxas had an iron-clad contract with Cygnus. What you have to worry about is Walburga. I know she hasn't accepted any prospects for her two sons yet." Fleamont shook his head faintly. Walburga might be a cousin but there was not an ounce of saneness in that woman. It was one of the main reasons Fleamont didn't associate with many of the Blacks. He does maintain a stable relationship with Alphard though.

"I hope I will not have to worry about that at all," grumbled Augustus. They didn't have a contract arranged for Eileen, a decision his father was extremely displeased with and was blamed for her 'disgraceful dalliance'.

"Here, here," echoed Fleamont. "Anyhow, it is almost lunch, is it not? Call the boys lest James would get too bored and drag Severus into mischief."

Augustus chuckled as he stood from his seat. "He can try. Severus is amazingly the most behaved child I ever came across. Totally opposite of young James."

"True," agreed Fleamont with a sly grin. It was partly his and his wife's fault. They coddled and spoiled James— too much, unfortunately. They couldn't help it. James was their miracle as they never thought they could ever have children.

While Augustus was ordering a house-elf to inform the children it was time for lunch, Fleamont suddenly had a late realization.

"Have you seen how James reacted to seeing Severus?" asked Fleamont casually.

Augustus glanced at his friend for a second before humming. "I can't say I have noticed. Why?"

"I believe James might be having his first crush."

Chapter 9 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/68048224)

Notes:

A/N: It's been a while since I've updated. And I don't think I'll get to update as much as I did before because my school workload is hectic as shit. Still, I won't abandon this story. I'm waiting for Christmas break maybe then I'd be able to write again to my leisure.

"If the beautiful were not in us, how would we ever recognize it?"
-Ernst Haas

It was only a month later that Alexios and Nikolaus came to Prince Manor for a visit.

The Ministry was extremely surprised to know that the Wizarding Greece Prince had stepped inside Britain willingly — and for social reasons. They do not know what he was doing nor do they know who he was visiting with his son. Sure, they had the Crown Prince currently in British soil but Prince Seth was exclusively living in the muggle world.

Alexios did not really have anything against the current minister, as did his brother, the King. The rift between the countries had been for more than a century. Still, they do not typically engage in affairs unless required mostly because of a 'disagreement' of beliefs. It was easier to cut ties than to continue an unhealthy relationship.

They do, however, know that current Minister Bagnold was trying to reform the bond between the two countries. After all, the Greeks have access to rare magical knowledge seeing that they had one of the first magical civilizations in the world. It would be such a waste not to have access to those.

So when they found out that Prince Alexios and Prince Nikolaus were applying for frequent access into Magical Britain, the Minister made sure they were as comfortable as possible.

"Your Highness, welcome to Britain," greeted Minister Bagnold with a firm handshake. "What brings you here, if I may be bold enough to ask?"

"My son and I are visiting a person very dear to us." Alexios did not bother telling exactly who they were visiting nor did he plan to ever tell it. They only had to visit the ministry once, just to have their access approved.

She would have pried but looking at the wizard's impatient expression, she went against it. Bagnold knew it was all she'd get from the Prince so she only wished them luck as she watched the two princes portkey to their destination. No matter, it surely won't be the last time she'll be seeing the Greeks.

Alexios and Nikolaus arrived right in the middle of the Prince Manor front lawn. Augustus and Severus were already waiting for them on the porch, and as soon as Severus laid eyes on his foster family, the boy instantly ran to give them both a crushing hug.

Augustus followed his grandson and shook Alexios's hand firmly. "Welcome to England, Alex, Nikolaus. Let us continue this inside."

"Thank you, Augustus," replied the prince as he glanced towards the man with a smile, his hand carding through Severus's hair.

They were ushered inside the manor directly into one of the bigger sitting rooms. Tea was already prepared by the elves and Augustus especially had stocked the pantry with ones from Greece to better accommodate their guests.

While the adults conversed— mostly about how Severus was adapting to his new home, the boys were up in Severus's room. Sev really wanted to show his brother the potions lab his grandfather made for him. James didn't like potions very much and Severus thought Niko would like it like he did.

"Look, Nik, I've got my own lab like back home!" exclaimed Severus happily as he dragged Nikolaus inside the connecting room.

Niko took notice of how Severus still regarded Greece as his home. It made him happy that his little brother didn't forget them at all, that even if he was very far away, Severus was still the same boy he promised to protect.

"It looks wonderful, Bambi. It looks even better than the one you have at home." Nikolaus studied the room approvingly. While he wasn't very interested in the art of potion-making, he knew Severus was a sucker for it.

"Are you happy here, Sev?" asked Nikolaus out of the blue. He was leading them out the room.

It took Severus by surprise but didn't dwell too much on how the question came to be. "Uh-huh. It's colder, though. And I made a new friend. His name is James."

The two boys sat on the edge of Severus's bed as they stared on the same blank wall.
"James? Is he good to you?" Nikolaus can't help but feel protective.

Severus only nodded. "I like him. He's funny. But he really, really likes flying... I don't."

The grimace on Sev's face made Niko chuckle. The first time he made Severus fly with him, the boy stayed mad at him for a whole day. As if it was his fault Severus was afraid of heights.

"I'm glad you're making friends. We really missed you at home, though."

Severus leaned his head on Niko's side. "I really missed you, too." His voice was quiet and distant.

The two boys sat there in silence, basking in the presence of one another. It wasn't until Severus invited Nikolaus to check out the latest potion he invented that they began to thoroughly make use of their limited time.

Of course, Alexios also made sure he had his time with Severus. The boy shared with him all the stuff he did in the manor and of his new friend. He told Alexios about the house-elves and the garden, and how much he loved the running around the hedges.

Alexios was glad Severus was settling in nicely. He didn't have to worry so much for the boy since he knew Augustus was very capable of taking care of Severus. He knew that now. It was all he wanted for Severus.

Augustus finally hired a tutor for Severus after a careful deliberation and an oath of silence.

Alicia Brown, a young 27-year-old witch, was hired to teach Severus on Monday to Wednesday from nine in the morning to two in the afternoon, just in time for his nap. She would have to improve Severus's reading and writing skills, and teach him basic Latin, maths, and history. Augustus preferred to handle Severus's etiquette, pureblood traditions, and house duty lessons, as well as in potions.

Severus's tutor did not know of his gift but just to be safe, Augustus made her swear and oath of silence. It wasn't unusual as most do practice it towards governesses. Alicia was from a pureblood family so she knew of it.

James also regularly visited Prince Manor, as did Severus in Potter Manor. Euphemia Potter had fallen in love with Severus the second she met the boy. She loves James with all her heart and soul but the 7-year-old can be quite a handful at times. Severus had a knack of making James behave. Her son, even though he was older than Severus, seem to follow the younger boy's actions. Severus was a very quiet and modest child, and Euphemia simply adored him. It helped that the little boy was for the lack of right term, gorgeous. He had silky hair that reached below his ears and sometimes covered half his face when the wind blows. The pale porcelain skin glowed, with eyes like onyx and pinkish-red lips. It was like Severus was destined to sport a rosy blush on his cheeks his whole life.

Euphemia wasn't the only one enamored by the boy. She knew for a fact that her son had a serious crush on Severus but had a feeling James didn't know it yet. James always comes home from Prince Manor with a huge smile and speaks about Severus from morning to evening. It was a little concerning for the parents when they realized their son might just be gay. No, they love James all the same but if James does choose to marry a man, they won't be getting any grandchildren

unless their son adopts. Adoption wasn't common in the wizarding world. Children already come rare. No magical parent ever abandons a child.

Of course, James might just be ostracized for his preference but Euphemia hoped the Wizarding World might lose its prejudice against homosexuals. While they may be able to bond legally, the public's view on them especially in the pureblood society would be less than appealing. After all, the '*sole purpose*' of marriage was to produce magical heirs.

Euphemia didn't know Severus was a bearer. If she did then there was no doubt she would have had that discussion with Augustus.

Severus did meet other children his age from all the events and dinners his grandfather brought him along but no one was a friend like James. Severus didn't like the other children. They were mean to him.

One time, Augustus was invited by the Felix Rosier to a dinner with his family. Prince Holdings had long since invested in other's businesses and the Rosiers aimed to make a business deal with Augustus.

Severus had only been in England for three months and the old wizard brought him along. In the end, Augustus realized he should never have accepted the invite at all. The moment he introduced Severus as his grandson, Felix unintentionally sneered at the boy and his son spat and called him mudblood. Everyone was aware that Augustus's daughter had gotten herself pregnant by a muggle and some even believed she'd run off with the scum. Of course, Felix apologized promptly as he needed Augustus Prince's money. It didn't deter the Prince Lord. As soon as Severus was badmouthed, Augustus ended their night.

The little boy didn't understand why his grandfather had gotten so furious towards the other people and immediately carried him back home. That night, Augustus sat him down and told him that he should never listen to what those people say. That him having a muggle father (which no one knew who it was as Eileen never got the chance to tell anyone) did not make him any less of a wizard. After that, Augustus didn't attend any more dinners with families he knew may spout disgraceful words about his grandson. He was all too happy to cut ties with such prejudiced people. After all, it wasn't like the Princes needed them. They already had shares in a handful of businesses including the Cleansweep Broom Company, the first developers of broomsticks for sports. Even then, with only the potions company Augustus built with Fleamont, he and Severus would live very comfortably.

Very few people had seen Severus but he had been the talk of the circle for some time. They all did not understand how Augustus was so accepting of a half-blood spawn since Atticus Prince was his father and everyone knew Atticus Prince was an epitome of a proud pureblood.

It was why Augustus kept Severus away from the public. He would rather face the music alone than have his grandson experience discrimination. Also, it was safer to distance the boy from the elitists so if Severus's gift comes to light, they won't have to worry so much about blackmails. Other than James, Severus didn't have many friends.

To Severus, it wasn't much of a difference. He never was one to enjoy a crowd and he liked James enough. Moreover, he had Nikolaus visiting him every fortnight. He was happy with how things were.

James was once again spending the afternoon in Prince Manor after Severus's tutoring sessions. He and Severus had formed a bond within the months. James really liked spending time with the slightly younger boy even if Severus liked different things. James was a bit more adventurous and reckless while Severus tends to enjoy reading his books or drawing. Sometimes, James would join Sev in what he does. Other times, Severus would join James in making a mess out of the manor. And if James ever wanted to fly, Severus would lay on the ground playing with his trains and sailboats while James zoomed above him.

It was one of those days.

"Sev, just once! I promise we won't fall. I'm very good at flying!" pleaded James. He really wanted Severus to join him in the air. He was even willing to let him ride along with him.

Severus who was sprawled on the grass with a storybook in his hand looked up at the boy hovering above him. "No, Jamie. I like it here."

"You always say that," whined James as he hopped off his broom to plop down next to his friend. He took a peek at the cover of the book Severus was reading. "What are you reading anyway? That looks new."

Severus nodded without looking at him. "Niko gave it to me yesterday. It's about an elephant trying to save a whole village inside a small speck of dust."

James furrowed his eyebrows at the plot. He never heard any story like that before. Why would an elephant save a village? And how did a village get inside a speck of dust? Were they shrunk?

Severus hadn't noticed his friend's confused face and continued telling the story. "The elephant, his name is Horton, goes into these adventures to put Whoville, that's the village, somewhere safe. The other animals were mean to him and told him he was stupid and crazy for thinking there were people in the speck of dust but Horton says again and again that 'a person is a person no matter how small'." Severus quoted the book. He remembered what his grandfather told him many nights ago; that his blood status didn't matter and it didn't make him any less of a wizard.

"That's... deep," deadpanned James, not fully understanding what his friend had just said. His mind was still trying to comprehend the fact that an entire village can fit inside a speck of dust. "I've never heard dad tell me that story before, though. But it's good, I guess."

"Niko said it's a muggle children's book," shrugged Severus.

"Oh! Well, that explains it then."

Severus goes back to reading his book the third time seeing that the conversation was over. James, on the other hand, kept musing next to the boy. His thoughts were haywired as usual.

Out of the blue, James asked, "Why have I not met Nikolaus yet? He only comes to visit when I'm not here."

Severus shrugged again but this time, faced his friend. "I don't know. Do you want to meet him?"

"Of course! You said he's your brother, right?"

"Uh-huh. Maybe we should ask Grandfather then." Severus didn't wait for James's agreement as he stood from where he's sprawled. "Come on. Grandfather is in his study."

James silently and mindlessly followed Severus inside the manor. He wasn't sure what Severus was going to ask Uncle Gus but chose not to comment on it. If Severus wanted to do something, the boy would make it happen.

Severus knocked twice on the huge oak door outside the Lord's Study, letting his grandfather know it was him.

"Boys? Do you need anything?" asked Augustus curiously at the two children.

Severus stepped forward to come stand next to Augustus and rested his head on the man's side. "James wanted to know when he'd get to meet Niko."

Augustus arched his eyebrow at the Potter heir. He was quite surprised it took James two months to ask. The boy had continually heard of Nikolaus but until today, James had not commented on it.

"I'll have to talk to Alex and Fleamont first. Maybe the next time Niko comes to visit, James will be around." Augustus peered at his grandson's friend questioningly.

"Thanks, Uncle Gus!" beamed James before frowning and grumbling. "Sev keeps talking about this Niko boy and I haven't met him yet."

Augustus realized James was a little jealous of someone else having Severus's attention. As much as he loved the kid, James can be a brat when he doesn't get what he wants. He deemed it safe as long as James didn't do anything or say anything that might hurt his grandson. Jealousy does stem hatred.

"Do not worry so much. You'll meet him soon enough," smiled Augustus as he ruffled James's hair. "Now that you are here, it's high time you floo back home, James. Your parents want you home before dinner."

James groaned in displeasure while Severus pouted at him. "Alright. Thanks for letting me come today, Uncle Gus. Bye Sev." James engulfed Severus in a hug before taking the older wizard's hand. Even though James was an expert in flooing, Augustus still preferred taking the boy himself, just to be sure James arrived safely.

As per usual, Severus waited on the settee for his grandfather to floo back from taking James home. It wasn't long until Augustus came back from the Potters. Severus was instantly standing next to his grandfather.

"How was your day, little one?" asked Augustus warmly.

"It was fine, Grandfather. James keep making me fly with him," complained Severus with a pout.

"I'll never understand why you don't like flying, lad. When I was your age, it was all I wanted to do. You do know when you start Hogwarts, you'll be required to pass Flying class?"

Severus huffed and crossed his arms over his chest. "Hogwarts is still years away."

"Be that as it may, you're going to have to get used to the idea. Anyhow, what would you like for dinner?" Augustus thought he should cook for the night just to keep his mind occupied with mundane things. He had had such a long day dealing with matters of family duties and businesses that an evening with his grandson, surrounded by aromatic spices was just what he needed.

Chapter 10 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/69426234)

Notes:

Merry Christmas Snames fans!

"Love is the recognition of oneness in the world of duality."
-Eckhart Tolle

James did not know what to expect when he was told he was invited to Nikolaus's 11th birthday party.

On one hand, he was excited to finally meet Severus's brother in all but blood. It was a long wait, to be honest. Having no idea that Nikolaus was a prince, James assumed Niko must be a very busy boy because it took another month since Severus had asked Uncle Gus.

On the other hand, it was daunting. James was used to attending birthday parties, but his dad told him it would be held outside Britain, specifically in Greece. It would be James's first time outside the country, and when he thought about it, he realized he would be the only kid who won't know anyone else aside from Severus. He found that he didn't like that one bit. He was worried Nikolaus won't like him and might tell Severus not to be his friend anymore.

James knew Severus held Nikolaus on a high pedestal.

"James," called Fleamont from outside his bedroom door. "Are you set? Augustus and Severus are already downstairs."

"Coming!" yelled James back. He quickly grabbed his coat and the neatly wrapped present courtesy of his mum from his desk and checked himself in the mirror once more.

Dressed in a dark gray vest over a white dress shirt paired with black trousers and black leather shoes, James dashed downstairs with his robe hanging over his shoulders.

Euphemia was all over Severus, fussing and cooing when James reached the drawing-room. The little boy was dressed in a simple dark button-down shirt with suspenders holding his khaki-colored shorts. James's mum was combing Severus's already smooth hair.

"There you are!" exclaimed Fleamont when he caught his son coming in. He then turned to his wife and rolled his eyes in jest. "Mia, let Severus breathe. Merlin!"

Severus giggled when the witch glared at her husband. "It's alright, Uncle. I can breathe still."

Augustus snorted and beckoned Severus next to him. Their portkey would activate in less than 10 minutes. Knowing his grandson, Severus would undoubtedly get nauseous after the trip. Augustus had a potion in his breast pocket ready to soothe the boy's stomach.

James went straight to Severus and gave his best friend a hug. "You look very nice, Sevy."

Severus beamed and returned the hug. "You look nice too!"

The adults shared a look and grinned. James was blushing all while Severus was being oblivious, not that they could blame the boy. He was only 6 years old! Augustus had a feeling he won't have to put Severus into any unwanted betrothals if things go well.

And while James wasn't that much older, he did grow up around his older cousins enough to have a small understanding of certain relationships. Hell, he fancied him for quite some time. Perhaps even the first time he met the onyx-eyed boy.

The 7-year-old, almost 8, didn't think there was anything wrong with fancying his best friend. From what his cousin Delphi told him to fancy someone means you really like them and want to be with them forever. James really liked playing with Severus even if the boy won't fly with him.

Fleamont could only hope Severus and James would end up together. Not because their offspring would be 'magically superior', nor because the Prince fortune was something to behold, but because Fleamont wanted his son to be happy. He knew though that talking to Augustus about arranging a contract for the boys was futile— at least at the moment. Augustus really wasn't a fan of the practice even before Severus came into the picture. Perhaps because Atticus once tried to arrange a marriage between him and a witch 10 years older than he was. It was quite Augustus's luck that his late wife, Melania Prince nee Avery, had come from a respectable Pureblood family that Atticus allowed their union.

Yet, Fleamont did not doubt James would be happy with Severus, and Severus happy with James. After all, the Potters usually get it right the first time.

The group arrived at the receiving area earlier than the rest of the guests. It was more because there were so many people waiting to say hi to Severus. Also, Alexios thought it would be better to introduce James to Nikolaus before his son's friends arrive.

"Augustus, Fleamont. I trust you had a safe journey?" inquired Prince Alexios with a small smile. He noticed Severus and James, he presumed, was sitting on the bench, their backs turned to the rest of the adults, currently in a serious discussion.

"We did, thank you," replied Augustus.

Alexios nodded in acknowledgment and turned his head to the only witch with them. "And you must be Mrs. Potter. Euphemia, right?"

"I am, Your Highness. It's a pleasure to finally meet you." Euphemia accepted the handshake demurely.

"Please, call me Alex. From what I assume, you are a permanent figure in my adoptive son's life."

Euphemia couldn't resist giving the prince a warm smile. "Indeed. Severus is such a wonderful boy."

All the men nodded in agreement. With that, they all turned to the two boys who still had not noticed the Prince's arrival and continued on with their conversation.

It wasn't until Alexios called for Severus that the children snapped their heads towards the adults. Severus was instantly on his feet and dashed to hug his foster father.

"Papa, this is James," introduced the boy happily, pushing James in front of him.

James squeaked at being openly shoved and cast a small glare at Severus who only returned an innocent grin. James peered at Alexios and again, squeaked, making his parents snort.

"I-uh, hello sir," stammered a pale James. Alexios wasn't by any means scary but when your friend basically forces you to stand less than a foot away from someone new, surely it would surprise anyone.

"Hello, James. My name is Alexios, Severus's adoptive father. I'm glad I now have a face to go with the name. Severus has been talking about you all the time." This time, James blushed strongly and looked away. It didn't go unnoticed by the prince and he raised an eyebrow at the older wizards and which who in turn shook their heads in amusement.

"Very well, then. Come. Nikolaus is waiting."

Severus held onto Alexios's hand as they walked down the path to the revival-styled house. The party will be held inside their family home, as opposed to having it in the palace ballroom.

As soon as the group entered the room, Nikolaus let out a yell and tackled Severus in a bone-crushing hug.

Severus merely giggled and returned the hug as ferociously as it was given. He handed the birthday boy his and James's gift which James earlier had Severus hold onto. A moment later, the pair pulled away and Severus ran to grab James over.

"This is James!" introduced Severus excitedly. "James, this is Nikolaus!"

James, again, was flustered at being shoved towards new people. Add to the fact that Nikolaus seemed to be eyeing him from head to toe, almost as if he was judging him. He didn't like it.

"So you're James," drawled Nikolaus as he folded his arms over his chest and stood straighter. He was only eleven, a very new eleven at that, but made an effort to look much older, perhaps to scare his little brother's new friend. Well, he doesn't really want to scare the boy. He just wanted to act like a big brother protecting his baby brother.

James dumbly nodded and grasped Severus's hand tightly making the younger boy yelp and adorably glared at him. James mouthed a 'sorry' and loosened his grip but not taking his hand off the other boy's.

"Hello," whispered James shyly. Nikolaus was nearly a foot taller than them which was saying something as James wasn't exactly short. James looked towards his parents only to find them in a serious conversation with Niko's father.

"Are you sure you're a good friend to Severus?" Nikolaus arched his eyebrow at the messy-haired boy. "You see, he's very important to me and I can't be around to protect him all the time. Are you sure you're up for the job?" As if it was James's responsibility as a friend to protect Severus.

James didn't mind though and he really does think it was his duty to protect Severus as he was older than the Prince heir. He nodded seriously, getting Nikolaus's approval.

"Niko, stop scaring Jamie! He's a very good friend!" scolded and defended the smallest of the group.

The eleven-year-old turned to Severus with a warm smile and ruffled his hair. "There, now, *Bambi*. I'm not scaring James. Isn't that right, Jamie?"

James squeaked out and immediately shook his head. "No, no, I'm not scared. Not at all!" However, his voice was a pitch higher than normal.

Severus didn't notice it and nodded once. "Good." His serious expression turned beaming as he hugged Niko for the second time. "Happy Birthday!"

"Thank you, Sev." Nikolaus smiled warmly at the adorable raven before turning again to James. "Come on then, James. I'll introduce you to the rest. My cousins from Italy will be coming over."

James silently followed the older boy, relieved that Nikolaus wasn't telling Severus to stop being his friend. Maybe being friends with Severus's brother won't be so bad after all.

Christmas was fast approaching.

Augustus stopped celebrating Yule since his wife died, and even before that, they only celebrated it privately. Now that he had Severus with him, the holiday once again felt alive. He had something to thank for and to live for. Even though he lost two of the people he loved, he gained the most precious grandson. It would be Severus's first Christmas with him and Augustus vowed to make it perfect.

Everything was going well. Augustus had a present in mind for Severus which he knows the boy will be ecstatic of. He planned to head to Diagon Alley right after the Wizengamot meeting and get his grandson his very first real potions equipment, suitable for a first year in fact. The wizard was confident in Severus's ability as he had spent months tutoring the boy. Severus was a natural like his mother and himself which made Augustus feel quite proud. He personally (and professionally) thought Severus was capable of handling real, first grade, simple potions under his supervision.

So with a contented heart, Augustus flooed to the Ministry, giddy to have it done with so he can finally head to the apothecary. Alicia was already instructed to take Severus to Potter Manor after their session as the wizard didn't want his grandson, no matter how well behaved, to be left alone in the huge manor with only house elves as companions.

"Lord Prince," called a silky voice from behind.

Augustus gracefully turned his head to acknowledge the said person. "Lord Malfoy." He nodded.

Abraxas casually flicked invisible dust from his lapel and with an arrogant expression said, "How is your grandson? Severus, right?" Judging from his voice, it was far from concern.

Augustus schooled his face impassively. Abraxas had always been a snotty little uppity brat he had the displeasure to be around in his youth given the Princes and the Malfoys had long dealt business together. "Indeed. And how is Lucius? I heard he's starting Hogwarts next year."

"He is. I am very proud of him. Such a wonderful boy. A very *suitable* heir."

It took all of Lord Prince's patience not to curse the man before him and merely nodded his head once in acknowledgment of his unnecessary comment. He was especially glad to hear the court starting as he loathed to think he'd have to suffer an extended period in the presence of the obnoxious prat. He wished Fleamont had attended with him but alas, his closest friend was out of the country in search of a rare potions ingredient.

Thankfully, the session had gone uneventful as the only bill discussed was the addition of a new subject in Hogwarts — Ancient Studies. Not many were opposed to the addition, mostly due to the fact that they currently have only one Ancient Studies Master in the UK who was, for the lack of a better term, ancient.

It pleased Augustus that he did not have to spend more than what was required. He wanted to get on his day and head back to his grandson soon.

His preparations did indeed turn fruitful as when Christmas came, Severus was one happy child.

It was as wonderful as Augustus imagined. The house-elves had outdone themselves on the decorations as well as the meals. Severus was unsurprisingly giddy at opening his presents first thing in the morning. The boy was almost in tears when he found a real potion kit among the pile and proceeded to tackle his grandfather in a hug. Add to the fact that Severus also received a beautiful journal from James that had the little potioneer's initials on it, Severus was extremely happy.

A few weeks later, Severus's happiness increased by ten-fold. He was finally 7 years old; basically a grown-up now. James always used his age as an excuse to smother Severus, telling him he was older than the raven therefore Severus should follow his orders— not that it ever happened anyway. He'd tease Severus for being younger than him even though in the end, James was usually the one ordered by the younger boy instead.

Severus's birthday party was a simple gathering rather than the typical grand 7-year-old birthday party the Pureblood Society usually observes. Of course, Alex and Nikolaus had attended, bringing tons of gifts from the rest of the family, the servants, and even the guards.

While Augustus thought Severus should interact with children aside from Nikolaus and James, he decided to have it on another day instead of inviting them on the boy's birthday. He did not want to overwhelm Severus, especially not on his birthday. Severus might not be a recluse and introverted kid but he does seem to enjoy his personal space very much.

So a week and a half after Sev's birthday, Augustus invited Philippe and Elizabeth Bones for a business dinner, at the same time have them bring their young children so they could meet Severus.

The Bones children apart from Edgar who was currently in his first year at Hogwarts had taken a liking to the Prince heir which delighted the doting grandfather's heart.
8-year-old John and 7-year-old Amelia were very well-mannered children, much like Severus and they spent the early night playing exploding snap on the drawing-room floor while the adults worked on a business deal.

"How come I haven't seen you in any galas, Severus?" asked Amelia as they sprawled on the floor after a very loud, messy game.

"Grandfather doesn't like many people," said Severus. His tone then changed and whispered back as if the grown-ups were in their presence, "But I think he only said that so I wouldn't get hurt. I know some didn't like me being here."

Amelia gasped and scowled. John nodded furiously behind her. "Why wouldn't people like you?!" John furrowed his brows angrily. He couldn't think of anything wrong with Severus. The boy was fun to play with even though he was quiet.

Severus half-shrugged. "Grandfather said it was because my father was a muggle... I don't even know him."

"So you're half-blood?"

The raven nodded and glanced apprehensively towards his two new friends. "Is that alright with you?"

Amelia's eyes widened and huffed, "Duh, of course. Mummy's half-blood as well. It would be hypo... hypotr... it would be two-faced of us."

"Hypocritical," corrected Severus with a smile.

John rolled his eyes and mumbled 'walking dictionary' in jest that earned him a playful punch and growl from Severus.

It was funny how easy it was for Severus to earn new friends. He's always been good at that even though he doesn't usually do much, nor had he had a lot of chances at it. Granted, he had made friends with their neighbors when he lived with his mother but none of them felt as real as the friends he had when he moved to the UK. He couldn't exactly count Nikolaus because he was his brother.

And it wasn't just the Bones that he made friends with, though the two slightly older children were the closest he had apart from James. He did meet a few more children, some younger than him, most of them older. Severus had made friends with Mr. Fortescue's daughter, Alice, and Benji Ollerton, the grandson of Barnaby Ollerton, owner of the Cleansweep Broom Company. He also met Icarus Nott and Sandra Zabini who were his age, and Kai Chang who was two years younger than him.

James, for his part, wasn't happy to share his best friend at all. Not even with Benji who loved flying as much as he did. He'd become quite possessive and every time someone else— didn't matter if it was someone he knew— James would hog Severus all to himself and scowl at anyone who dares to take the raven-haired away from his side. It came to a point that Fleamont had to intervene and had a very patient chat with the boy.

"James, I know you and Severus are best friends but Severus can have friends of his own too much as you have," said Fleamont.

James pouted and whined. "But dad! They're taking Sev from me! He's mine!"

Fleamont grabbed James carefully but firmly by the shoulders and shook his head. "They cannot take Severus from you, son, just as you cannot take Severus from them. He is not an object to possess. Severus won't like that. Am I understood?"

The boy looked as if he was resisting tears and nodded slowly. "I understand, dad. Severus is not an object. I know." James looked down sadly for thinking of his best friend like that. He just can't help but feel jealous. For almost a year, it had always been him and Severus.

The father sighed and ruffled his son's hair, knowing just what James had on his mind. "You need not worry, James. Severus won't stop being your best friend just because he's making new ones. Soon enough, you're going to Hogwarts. You won't want Severus alone for a whole year, wouldn't you?"

That sobered James and nodded, this time with more aggression. No, he probably won't stop feeling jealous but he's not just going to let it get in between his and Severus's friendship. If it means he had to deal with other kids then so be it.

Chapter 11 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/71550423)

"Love is recognition, perhaps the highest form of it."
- Mary Mcmullen

Severus thrived socially and academically in the two years he lived with his grandfather. Augustus had no doubt his grandson would become the youngest Potions Master in all of Europe. He was diligent in his studies and training. The boy was as good, if not better than any of those pureblood heirs and heiresses.

Better than he'd ever been as a child, in all fairness.

His friendship with James grew even closer even though they had started having separate friends. Like most children raised in the Wizarding World, when James turned 8, he began attending a private class he shared with other children including John and Alice. Small private classes were common in their practice. Some groups only allowed Purebloods, though the one James attended allowed half-bloods. He was classmates with Frank Longbottom, Marlene Mckinnon, William Greengrass, Remus Lupin, Alfie Karfic, Jeffrey Mcmillan, and Edward Prewett. Of them all, Remus was James's closest friend in school.

Still, James and Severus were thick as thieves. No matter their personality differences, both boys were the best of friends. The Prince heir's quiet and reserved nature perfectly balances the Potter heir's wild and carefree one.

There was no point in arguing that James was spoiled by his parents. So when he asked his parents if he could sleepover at Severus's, Fleamont and Euphemia resigned themselves to having a Severus over or James away at least twice a month, to the point where James already has his own room in the Prince Estate and Severus has his in Potter Manor.

Of course, it did worry Augustus that his little Severus would be spending the night with another boy but quickly shook those thoughts away. It wasn't like they weren't supervised. And even though it was clear that James held a torch for his grandson, the Potter heir was still a young, innocent boy.

Augustus, however, was slowly starting to accept that he won't get to wrap Severus in a safety bubble forever. There will come a time when his grandson would finally start his schooling and possibly sleep in a dormitory. It was easy for him to dismiss any negative thoughts of Severus and James together because he was certain no harm will come to the two boys. James, for all his mischief, was still young and innocent. And even then, Augustus was confident in Fleamont and Euphemia's upraising.

Everything was quite perfect. Even Severus's status as a carrier hadn't garnered any unwanted attention.

...

Up until one morning in October.

Augustus and Fleamont were out of town on a conference, Euphemia was visiting her family, and Philippe Bones, an Auror, had just gotten back on a mission and was in the Ministry for reporting.

On busy weekends such as this, the children usually spend their day together. This time, Severus and James were on a play date with the Bones children. Nothing too troubling.

But of course, with four young children, mischief was unfortunately expected.

In the children's defense, they didn't know the berries were poisonous. They were merely playing near the edge of the forest at the back of the Bones residence. Amelia and John were used to their backyard and had always loved picking blackberries. One thing led to another and all four children were picking random berries and eating them out of curiosity. Severus might be a smart kid but he was still that— a kid.

So when Elizabeth Bones called them in for lunch, she had not anticipated having to face four dizzy, green-faced miscreants. One look at the single holly berry still clutched on her son's hand had her in panic and immediately called St. Mungo's.

In a matter of minutes, Severus, James, John and Amelia were taken to the children's ward. The four had already started throwing up really bad. Even Severus and Amelia had accidents that the healers couldn't simply spell them clean.

Severus in particular was a sobbing mess and vehemently refused to be cleaned up. The healers simply assumed the boy was ashamed and tired. They couldn't give them any sleeping potions until they took their antidotes.

Elizabeth quickly sent a Patronus (she was lucky she was a fully trained Auror and learned to do that) to Augustus, Fleamont, Euphemia, and Philippe.

Euphemia was the first to arrive followed by Philippe. The two promptly went to find the children. They didn't know what was happening or why some healers were looking at them with awe and interest. All they knew was that one moment they were in the children's ward getting worried for the children and the next minute they were directed to a heavily private ward on a different floor level.

Fleamont and Augustus didn't arrive until half an hour later due to having troubles with their portkey.

Augustus immediately demanded for Healer Smethwyck, the Prince family healer to personally look after his grandson and his friends. It wasn't just because he wanted the kids to have the best care possible but also because he was worried a random healer might discover something. Apart from Alexios and Fleamont, only Healer Smethwyck knew of Severus's gift.

Unfortunately, everything that could go wrong went wrong. Healer Smethwyck was on sick leave, his grandson and his friends were experiencing heavy bouts of stomach cramping and diarrhea. A healer trainee had cleaned them up, accidentally discovering Severus's condition.

Augustus realized quickly it was too late when he arrived in St. Mungo's. His demands for their family healer had no effect. While he and Fleamont were dashing through the hospital hallways to get to their little ones, whispers were already popping out left and right. Some louder than others.

The news of the Prince heir being a bearer echoed through the walls of St. Mungo's. Patient confidentiality be damned.

With utmost determination and seething anger, Augustus made his way to the children's room, snarling and scowling at the few interns and onlookers wanting to have a glimpse of the young bearer.

"Grandpa!" cried his weeping grandson behind the protective hold of Elizabeth Bones.

"Severus! Merlin, I am so worried!" Augustus scooped the little raven in his arms and cuddled him close. He could faintly hear Fleamont barking at the busybodies to leave. He could hear the Bones talking about calling the Aurors for added security. He could hear Euphemia comforting a confused and worried James while the two Bones children had long succumbed to sleep. He could hear them but at that moment, nothing was more important than the sobbing of his precious Severus.

"I didn't m-mean to, G-grandfather! I- I said no b-but they, they still dr-dressed me," explained Severus between sobs. Severus hated disappointing his grandfather. He was always careful and prided himself in his ability to keep a secret.

"Hush, my little prince. I do not blame you at all," whispered Augustus. He felt his heart twinge with sympathy at the apparent guilt of his young charge. "It matters not now the public knows. Grandfather will deal with it. And you are very tired, yes? Rest, my prince, I'm here now."

The effect of the potions that should have caught up with the child as soon as he took them was finally catching up. Severus had fallen right to sleep with his head buried on his grandfather's neck.

The room as quiet as opposed to the mess outside. Fleamont was pacing across the relatively large space, worry etched on his face, the Boneses were doing their best not to stare at Severus's sleeping figure while carding their fingers over their children's hair, and Euphemia was cuddling her son to sleep.

The question of whether the rumor was true or not was left unsaid. By Augustus's expression alone, everybody in the room could only assume it was.

"Gus..." started Fleamont.

"I know. It will be a riot," sighed Augustus.

Fleamont nodded, "What ever shall we do?" The question wasn't supposed to be rhetorical but Augustus had no answer yet so he left it at that.

"I am really sorry, Augustus. I had no idea," said Elizabeth. She wanted to ask questions about Severus but decided it was not the time for curiosity.

Augustus gave her a smile that did not reach his eyes. "I do not blame you, Liz. You couldn't have known. I would have taken the children here as well."

"Have that healer fired at once," demanded Euphemia. She, too, had so many questions but his worry for the boy she considered a son was more important than her petty grievances of not being informed of Severus's situation.

"I plan on it," replied Augustus gravely, brushing the wayward hair off his grandson's angelic face.

The head healer came by the shared private room shortly and apologized greatly for the appalling conduct of their trainee. Healer Utzon assured the worried grandfather that said healer was quickly dismissed for breaking patient confidentiality. There really was no reason for Severus's predicament to become public news. All four children were privately treated as requested by Elizabeth Bones. Alas, the now ex-healer just could not stop her mouth from announcing in the staff room that the child she assisted dressing up was a bearer. The news then reached the rest of the people in the hospital within minutes. Every healer in the department was on suspension.

Augustus supposed it would happen sooner or later. He could not hide Severus or lock him up a tower for the rest of his life. He considered them lucky that the secret was out at a time when Severus can still be protected inside the manor allowing the news die out for a while. Augustus shuddered to think it come up when Severus is at school.

Of course, the recent developments did not deter the parents and grandparent from chastising the brats of their foolish actions leading them to be poisoned. Fortunately, the children weren't as badly affected since they had not taken more than 3 berries each. Augustus, for his part, was disappointed in Severus's foolishness. He may not recognize every poisonous berry yet but the child knew not to eat just about anything he finds in the wild. Sure enough, that certain lesson would be remembered their whole lives.

Philippe Bones had called authorities as soon as he got Augustus's permission which was why two Aurors stood guard outside the room. Lord Prince couldn't and wouldn't take chance on the safety of his grandson. While it may not be that much of a deal to some wizards and witches, there are a few truly vicious ones out there who would gladly take Severus as bride without consent. Some might even have the boy killed to spite the Prince family name. They had enough enemies as it is.

James was particularly worried for his best friend. He did not understand why everybody was acting skittish and protective. They weren't even allowed to leave the room! When he asked his mum and dad, they told him it wasn't safe to discuss yet and he had to wait until they get home. All he knew was that it had something to do with Severus. And that didin't sit well with him at all.

The three families stayed in St. Mungo's for another two days just to make sure no residual poison was left in their bodies. Their journey home was chaotic and frantic. The hospital's wards prohibited them from apparating or porkeying directly from the rooms which was why they had to leave through the doors. Photographers and journalists were swarming outside the building trying to get a picture or an interview of Lord Prince and his grandson.

Fortunately, the Potters owned an invisibility cloak and lent it to the Princes. Augustus and Severus were able to floo home unbothered.

"Frances, please take Severus to his room," ordered Augustus to the house-elf. Severus glanced up at him with a confused expression.

"I need to speak with Alex for a while, young one. Go with Frances for now."

As soon as he was sure Severus was out the room, he headed back to the fireplace and tossed a decent amount of floo powder, calling the Greek Prince's home.

"Augustus?" Alexios answered.

"We have a situation, Alex. Can you floo right now? I cannot leave Severus in the manor alone."

Alexios responded with an affirmative nod and asked Lord Prince to step back.

"What is the situation? You do not typically request my presence if it is not dire," commented the prince with a tone of concern.

Augustus lead Alexios towards the seat and sighed. "Earlier this week, Severus and his friends were admitted to St. Mungo's— yes he's alright now. That's not the problem. I realize you did not have a subscription of the British paper thus you have no idea what was happening recently.

"Severus's gift had been discovered, Alex. And I am at a loss at what to do. I have not confirmed nor denied anything yet but since I have called Aurors to guard the past few days, the public assumed it true."

Alexios, entirely unlike himself, exhaled shakily. "How did that happen?" He hoped Severus was alright.

Augustus went on to explain the recent events to the prince. He confided in him about his concerns for the safety of his grandson and that he was reluctantly grateful it came out at a time when he can still protect the boy.

"No. You are right. It is bound to happen anyway when he starts school. How is Severus doing?" Alexios asked.

"A bit more quiet than usual. He was feeling guilty over the commotion and blamed himself for not stopping the healer from cleaning him," replied Augustus.

"I trust you've talked him out of that?"

"Of course I did." Augustus felt weary how much the commotions of the foreseeable future might do to Severus. He's already received a few owls hours after the news came out from acquaintances and strangers alike regarding the possibility of a betrothal. If Severus ever reads one of them, he might just be scarred for life. One 40-year-old man even proposed to be married, in quite vulgar words at that, within the year all while Severus was only just 9.

"And what can we do now?" asked Alexios.

"That's why I have called you here. I have no idea aside from redirecting our mail for a while. The house elevs informed me we have been receiving at least two dozen correspondences a day, some of them are quite indecent. I have even received a proposal from Lord Crompton, an old widow asking Severus's hand in marriage." Augustus spat in disgust.

"That is indeed troublesome," commented Alex with a sigh. "Have you called your family lawyer?"

"I have. Charles informed me that I check Gringotts for any old Prince betrothal contracts in case someone might use them in their favor. I will be doing that first thing tomorrow. He also opposed my wish to sue the Daily Prophet and the healer—unless I want to confirm the rumors."

"Are you? Confirming it, I mean."

Augustus slowly nodded. "I will in time. However, I would like it if Severus enters a contract before I give any confirmation. For security, I suppose. I realize it is foolish of me to leave him available in a co-ed boarding school."

"Have you had anyone in mind yet? And do you think Severus would be open to such change? He is only 9, Augustus. I understand in Britain, it is fairly common to wed at a young age but forgive me if I worry it will harm the boy."

"I understand completely. I, too, am not entirely on board with the practice. My father almost did it to me with an awful older witch. Circe, Orion even had to marry his own cousin! I'd love to avoid that for Severus. And while I have someone in mind, it still needs to be discussed some other time. I will have to check in with Sev first if he's agreeable."

Alexios regarded his friend with approval. He was delighted that Augustus would not leave Severus in the dark and make the choice for him. Severus, while young, is intelligent and mature enough to make his own choices. There are contracts which are more lenient than others, sufficient for an early betrothal.

The two continued to talk but moved to less serious topics such as Severus's growing love for muggle Science books and Nikolaus's studies.

With a parting promise of an owl as soon as Augustus had the talk with Severus, Alex flooed back to Greece.

Chapter 12 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/72109626)

Notes:

I'm part Chinese so Happy Chinese New Year! For those that aren't or just don't care then have a happy day anyway. Spread love, especially in the comments, I get enough hate in real life as it is.

Again, Severus is a year younger than the Marauders. No rational reason. Mostly dialogues :)

"True love is your soul's recognition of its counterpoint in another."
- Owen Wilson

After the St. Mungo's incident, Fleamont and Euphemia sat down with James and talked to him about Severus's gift, and to the best of their abilities, answered his questions. Not that it helped much. Even though the history of bearers is public knowledge, there was no reason for a child their generation to know about them at a young age. It wasn't in the school curriculum. It was confusing for James when his parents told him Severus is not just a boy.

James didn't see Severus until a week later. Augustus had taken Severus out to Greece for a week in the company of the boy's adoptive father so he could deal with the letters and contracts. James missed his best friend dearly.

Plus, he had about a hundred questions (not all related to his gift) to ask Severus!

So when his mum finally dropped him off Prince Manor, James didn't wait another second before running up to Severus's bedroom. Augustus simply rolled his eyes at the blatant disrespect and offered Euphemia tea.

James found Severus on the bedroom floor reading another muggle book and tackled him with a fierce hug.

"Missed you!" cried James happily. "Where've you been all week?! I thought I was going to die of boredom!"

Severus snorted as he returned the hug. "I was with Papa in Greece. We went to visit Niko in his school. It was amazing."

"Really?? What was it like??" James pulled himself up the floor and plopped right onto Severus's bed.

"It's not a castle like Hogwarts but it was beautiful! Papa said it used to be a small acropolis built by Apollo, the god of knowledge."

"Cool! Though I think I'd still prefer a castle like Hogwarts for a school... you're going to Hogwarts right?" James asked apprehensively. They always talked about going to school together even if they aren't in the same year, but for a moment there, James was worried Severus might like the Greek school more.

Severus simply raised an eyebrow at his best friend and looked at him as if he was stupid. "Of course, where else would I go?"

James breathed in a sigh of relief. "Good... school won't be the same without you."

"I'm a year below you, you know," Severus rolled his eyes.

James waved his hand dismissively. "Eh, semantics."

The two laid side by side in bed, relishing quietly in the company of another. A week apart was a long time for Severus and James. They've gotten so used to each other's presence that it didn't feel right not to see each other for more than three days. Severus was much more experienced with the distance since he usually spends weekends in Greece. Plus, he had practice being separated with Niko and Prince Alexios longer.

James just wasn't used to that yet. The past few days were confusing and lonely for the ten-year-old. His parents had told him his best friend was a someone out of a history book and said best friend wasn't there to answer his questions.

"Are you really a girl?" James blurted after a moment of silence. It was the one thing he was most confused about.

Severus turned his head and blinked at his friend in shock.

"*I'm not a girl!* Why would you think so?" Severus glared at James heatedly, offended at the innocent question.

"But dad said you are a bearer, carrier, whatever; which means you can have babies when you grow up," defended James. "Girls have *babies*."

"Grandfather said I can be anything I want! He said I don't have to be a girl if I say I'm not. I like being a boy! You said girls have cooties!" whined Severus childishly.

James raised both hands in surrender and then sent Severus a comforting smile. "Don't worry Sev, I like you as a boy too. And even if you are a girl, you won't have cooties!" James suddenly wanting to prove his point, leaned and kissed him on the cheek, surprising himself more than it did Severus.

Severus, instead, beamed at the older boy and gave him a kiss on his cheek as well. It meant James didn't think he had cooties at all. It wasn't anything romantic yet, at least for Severus. His grandfather usually kissed him on the forehead. He thought James kissing him on the cheek was just like that.

As for James, a kiss on the cheek from Severus was enough to turn him tomato-red. He knew for a fact he had a huge crush on his friend for three years. James's was a young 10-year-old boy who had older cousins who were in relationships. There were some information he was privy to that if his father ever found out, his cousins would get the verbal lashing of their lives. At least they didn't tell James anything that was borderline sexual, just tips on how to make girls, or in his case, Severus, fancy him.

It wasn't that James fully understood the potential of his attraction to Severus. For him, Severus was someone he would always want to be around. He wanted to be with Severus like his dad was with his mum. He knew even before they were younger that he wanted to be with Severus when he grows up; that Severus would be his and he would be Severus's.

-

It wasn't until two weeks later that Alex received an owl from Lord Prince.

"Have you talked to him?" Alex asked.

"I have, but I left out the details," replied Augustus.

"What did Severus say?

"Severus knows about wizarding practices so he understands the implication. He has acquaintances that are engaged as well. He asked me if it's for the best and I told him as much. I told him it's what I think is the best course of action. It seemed enough for him and told me he trusts my judgment." Augustus said it with a rather amused and thoughtful smile. "Though he was quite insistent not to be married off very young. He wants to finish his mastery first."

"Smart child. It doesn't have to be magically binding so Severus will still have a choice in the matter when he decides against it in the future." Prince Alexios tapped on the wooden desk, a habit he had when he was thinking.

"That is why I have asked for this meeting. I know you would want to give your insights to the next steps," said Augustus.

"Thank you for considering me, Augustus," smiled Alexios. "In any case, are you arranging a betrothal to a witch or wizard?"

"A wizard," replied Augustus directly. "A wizard will provide further protection when Severus starts school. Most girls I know that are around Severus's age are all raised to be wives thus were not trained to duel."

"Will Severus mind being engaged to a boy?" asked Alexios seriously. While his sexuality no longer matters in the wizarding world, nor does his partner's, it would be cruel to force Severus into a contract with someone he does not even like.

"I think he doesn't know himself yet. Although..." Augustus furrowed his eyebrows and stared at a blank wall, his thoughts running amok. "I have a feeling he wouldn't be adverse if it were James. I trust the Potters. He's his best friend, and I know for a fact James had been crushing on my grandson the moment he laid eyes on Severus. James is also magically gifted. He will be able to protect Severus should the need arise."

"James," drawled Alexios but without the bite. "Will Fleamont agree to this? The contract will be mostly for Severus's benefit."

Augustus nodded. "Fleamont would be ecstatic. He adores Severus and he knows about James's fondness towards my grandson. He was quite worried he wouldn't be having grandchildren, as a matter of fact. James isn't actually subtle in his affection towards Severus."

That earned a snort from the prince. "Well then, James is a lucky boy. It will do him good to remember that," commented Alexios, feeling his protectiveness towards Severus flare.

"I would not worry. I watched him grow up. James is a good and intelligent young lad. He'll be good to and for Severus. I have no doubt." And it was true. Augustus fully believed that. James was already as protective as they were. He would never let anything hurt Severus. A bit spoiled but Severus always had a knack for dealing with the boy.

"I believe we should have Fleamont visit today," suggested Alexios. He wanted to be there while the contract was negotiated. It wouldn't be final though, not without the children's permission.

Augustus gave a single nod and went to floo his friend while Alexios contemplate their decision. It was the most practical and safest route now that everyone knows of Severus's status as a carrier. It should not be a difficult decision

considering arranged marriages were normal in the Wizarding World, both inside and outside Britain.

When Alexios warned Augustus against marrying Severus off a few years earlier, he wasn't exactly against betrothing his adopted son, only that he should not be sold like cattle to the richest bidder like many before him. Even if it was for the best, Alexios would still put his foot forward if it meant taking away Severus's happiness. For it being James, Alexios thought it might not be as bad as it seems. He had come to like the Potters and for two years, watched James pining over their little raven. He only hoped they would not end up harming the children.

Fleamont appeared with Augustus with a frown on his usually cheerful face. He shook Alexios's hand firmly and nodded his greetings.

Augustus had not said anything aside from they needed to talk about matters regarding Severus. Fleamont didn't need to be told twice as he immediately flooed straight to Prince Manor. Severus's safety was as important to him as it was for the other two wizards.

He did not, however, guess what Augustus and Alexios needed for him. He simply sat there, slacked-jaw of what Augustus had said.

"This is not a formal appeal yet, but would you be open to negotiating a contract between Severus and James?"

Yes, he was. There was no reason not to. It would take an idiot not to notice James was head over heels for Severus. And he was quite confident that Severus may also have been crushing on his son though more subtle and young. It would also mean Severus would be protected. The mere betrothal will ward off most, if not all suitors. No proper pureblood will dishonor such agreement.

"Of course, I am. Euphemia will be overjoyed. But should we not discuss it with the children?" Fleamont arched his eyebrow towards the other wizards.

"And we will. We just need to discuss the basics of the contract first so we will have something to work with when we talk to them," replied Augustus as he removed a long sheet of parchment from his desk drawer. "This is a standard non-blood binding contract. There will be changes, obviously, and I need both your opinions on this."

Augustus read through the parchment. It was indeed standard. The bonding ceremony will be done on the younger party's 17th birthday, the legal age in the Wizarding world. An heir shall be produced before the 25th birthday, and both parties may or may not provide succeeding children. There's a fidelity clause to it and a chastity clause. No intercourse shall occur before the bonding, as it was proper. Since it would not be blood-binding, the contract can be voided within the same one year period given both parties were amendable. Breach of contract will result in the voiding of the betrothal and compensation of a thousand galleons from the offending party.

"Right, so first, as requested by Severus, he shall not be bonded before he finishes his Mastery so we'll have to amend that part. His 21st birthday perhaps?" Augustus inquired which he received agreements from the other two.

"And regarding a deadline for producing children, I suggest we remove them. I don't want them to look at it as an obligation," said Fleamont. Somehow, he was scared that like him, James might not be as fertile. Putting a deadline on it will only stress his son. Plus, he believes Severus should be able to decide when he wants to have children as it is in fact his body.

That earned agreements as well. They kept the fidelity clause and a chastity clause just until they're both reached maturity, and added a security clause that basically prohibits anyone from interfering with the contract. Doing so will cause his or her magic to be bounded for a whole year. It was Alex's idea that he got from the same engagement agreement he had with his late wife.

They did have a disagreement of some sort as to who takes whose name. Naturally, Fleamont wanted the Potter line to continue. Augustus wanted it for the Prince as well. Thankfully, Alex mitigated and put up the idea of hyphenating. It

wasn't traditionally practiced in their society so it did not cross their minds. Usually, girls just take their husband's name and in the case of bearers, the one of less standing (in wealth and power) takes the name of the other.

Power-wise, the Princes were above Potters but in terms of wealth, the Potters were richer. Hyphenating would be a good compromise that way both Noble Houses would be represented.

All that's left was to inform the children.

-

Informing the children was easier than they thought.

James was unsurprisingly ecstatic. Being betrothed to his bestest friend was like a dream come true for him.

Severus, too, was happy with his grandfather's decision. When he was told he would be betrothed before he starts school, he was worried he'd end up marrying a stranger. Severus felt bad for thinking that his grandfather would do that to him.

He was also glad he'd been given time to finish a mastery first before being required to wed.

When the betrothal contract was completed and signed, Augustus immediately released an official statement to The Daily Prophet announcing that Heir Prince was officially engaged. No information as to whom or what the contract includes were released.

Stories and rumors were written daily for a few weeks. Some were imaginative, others were plain right cruel. Some think it was all a ruse for the Prince family to gain publicity and more power (Ha! as if they need more of that). Some believe Augustus created a potion to turn Severus into a bearer (like that's even possible). There were even talks that Severus wasn't truly half-blood. The Purebloods found it offensive that the 'Gift' as they called it was given to someone mixed with dirty blood. Augustus had completely laughed at that. He could still remember the smug look on Malfoy's face after Eileen was disowned. He was so glad Lucius had entered an iron-clad contract with the youngest Black for Augustus was confident Abraxas would do everything to set his son up with Severus. It was one problem evaded.

Augustus also finally filed a lawsuit against the healer who sold the story to the papers. It may have occurred more than a month prior but the Princes have never been known to forgive and forget.

Soon enough, the hype of a newly discovered bearer was beginning to lose interest on some. Four months after the incident, Severus could already go out to Diagon Alley with his grandfather without being bombarded by the press. His life was back to being relatively normal apart from the continuous completely dishonorable marriage proposals. His lessons with Ms. Brown continued, the play dates weren't as often as before but he could have his friends over anytime he wanted. He still floos in and out of Greece to visit his adoptive family. And his friendship with James hadn't turned south.

Nothing really changed in their relationship apart from the added lessons of Potter family history for Severus and Prince family history for James. Although, Euphemia would take Severus more and more to shop with her given James was never one to spend time in a bookstore and an apothecary. Lady Potter was just glad she could finally unofficially call Severus her son.

There were a few kisses on the cheek now and then, but other than that, the two remained the same. They still fought over their preferred activities. James still couldn't convince Severus to fly with him. Severus still couldn't convince James to test the potions he made. They still made the house elves want to pull their hair out (if they had some).

Everything is *normal.* Just as it had been two years earlier.

Until James received his letter.

Chapter 13 **(http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/73251117)**

“I've been making a list of the things they don't teach you at school. They don't teach you how to love somebody. They don't teach you how to be famous. They don't teach you how to be rich or how to be poor. They don't teach you how to walk away from someone you don't love any longer. They don't teach you how to know what's going on in someone else's mind. They don't teach you what to say to someone who's dying. They don't teach you anything worth knowing.”
— Neil Gaiman, The Kindly Ones

James wasn't used to saying goodbye. Even though it was only temporary, he didn't like the fact that he'd have to be apart from Severus, his best friend and intended, for months.

They've always known it would happen sooner or later. James would start school ahead of Severus which means they wouldn't see each other for a long time. Of course, they'd still talk every night through the two-way journal his father and Lord Prince got them, but it won't be the same. James won't get his goodnight kiss on the cheek when one of them heads home. It was secretly James's favorite part of the day.

It was also Severus's favorite but he won't say that. They might be engaged and all but Severus was a sucker for propriety. He read all the books on decorum and betrothal etiquette and even though theirs wasn't normal, he'd sure try to be proper. He knows that kisses shouldn't be given freely. Severus was positive his grandfather was pleased with how he dealt with James. *Teaching that boy boundary... very good, Severus. James needs to learn he won't always get what he wants.* His grandfather would say.

He's not an overly emotional person. He doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve like James. But it doesn't mean he won't feel like crying when his best friend hugged him goodbye to leave for Hogwarts.

The train station was too crowded for Severus's taste but at that moment, he didn't care. He hugged James like his life depended on it.

"Keep your journal with you at all times. Do. You. Understand?" Severus's face was serious, his eyebrows scrunched conveying his displeasure at relying on the journal alone for communication. He wished he was born a year earlier so he could go to school with James.

"Promise," vowed James, crossing his heart. "I'll write to you tonight when I'll be in bed. In the Gryffindor dorms," A cheeky grin plastered on the 11-year-old's face.

Severus rolled his eyes yet couldn't help but smile. It had been an ongoing inside joke between them. James was adamant he'd be a Gryffindor or else he'll hop on the train back home first thing in the morning. Drama Queen. "Yeah, sure, you brave lion," The smile quickly turned into a frown. "I'll miss you, Jamie."

James pulled the raven into another hug and whispered, "I'll miss you more, Sev."

Severus looked around them for a second and noticed nobody was really minding them. Even his grandfather and the Potters were talking to another couple. The students were already boarding the train and the parents were too busy fussing over their children to even notice them.

So Severus did something he never thought he'd do in public. He kissed James on the lips for a good three seconds.

James simply stood there in shock. He knew they'd eventually kiss but he didn't expect Severus to do it in public. It was their first kiss! And he didn't even get to relish it for all its worth!

"Wow," breathed James dreamily, unconsciously brushing his lips with his fingers.

Severus kept his giggles down at the look of surprise on the other boy's face. "Don't get used to it," he huffed.

"Hey, hey! Let's not be hasty," James waved his hands around. "I expect another one, a longer one when I return for the holidays. 10 seconds! Tops!"

"We'll see," piped Severus with an arched brow and folded arms.

"James! You need to board the train now," called Fleamont a few feet from them, beckoning the two to come closer.

With a defeated sigh, James grabbed Severus's hand in his and dragged him towards the adults. The last goodbyes and tear-filled hugs were exchanged, and a final kiss on the cheek from Severus, James boarded the train.

Severus sighed sadly as he waved back at James. He still had Amelia as company since John's going to Hogwarts as well but it wouldn't be the same. Even Nikolaus has school so it meant he'd have to spend the rest of the year mostly alone.

He can't wait to go to Hogwarts next year.

-

James couldn't find John so he ended up sitting alone in an empty carriage. He wished Severus was with him so he wouldn't feel so alone. He was glad he had the journal though. That way, they could still talk every day.

"Hello," a small, nervous voice greeted from the doorway. "Can I sit here?"

James smiled at the black-haired boy and nodded. "My name is James Potter. Are you a firstie, too?"

The new boy sat opposite of James and seemingly lost the initial shyness. "Yes. My name is Sirius Black. You are a Potter, eh? Dorothea Black married a Potter."

"That's my great-grandmother," informed James. He was familiar with the Blacks but aside from Uncle Alphard, he hadn't met any of them. He once heard his father tell his mum the Blacks were mostly blood supremacists, and since they interact with muggleborns and half-bloods, they see the Potters as blood traitors.

Sirius sat down opposite to James and gave him a long, scrutinizing gaze. "How come I don't see you in any of the parties then?"

James shrugged. "Dad doesn't like going. I don't think I'd like it too. Too stuffy. Plus, I think your family hates mine."

"Parties are stuffy, you got that right. And I don't care if my 'family' hates yours. I hate mine too."

The brunette nodded in sympathy. He would never admit it but that was all Severus's influence. If he hadn't met the raven, he would have seriously told Sirius it was only right to hate his family because they're prejudiced and evil. Even if Severus wasn't with him, his betrothed would be disappointed by his insensitivity. His best friend was a pacifist, whatever that means. He might not agree with a lot of Britain's Wizarding values especially towards muggleborns and half-bloods but he was never one to start a fight. He quite believed in proving them wrong than protesting against everyone else.

"I'm sorry," said James.

"It's alright. My brother, Regulus, isn't so bad. I guess dad too. I hate my mother though."

James nodded with a faint smile. He felt bad for Sirius. He couldn't imagine hating his own mum but with what he knows about the Blacks, it might not be unreasonable. At least Sirius likes his brother and father. Hating your whole family seems like a sad life.

"What have you got there?" asked Sirius curiously, looking at the journal James was holding reverently in his lap.

James glanced back to the boy before staring back at the treasure. "Oh, my betrothed gave this to me."

Sirius' face scrunched up in equal parts disgust and pity. He was thankful his parents hadn't signed a contract for him and his brother yet. Walburga was so preoccupied with pursuing the Prince boy to welcome any other prospect. Only the best for the Blacks, she'd say. Sirius supposed being betrothed to a carrier wasn't so bad. Better that than a sniveling girl. All the girls his age were too annoying. At least a boy can keep up with his pranks.

But looking at the messy-haired boy in front of him, Sirius could see James wasn't against his betrothal judging by how he held his fiancé's gift.

"You must really like her," commented Sirius.

James merely nodded, not bothering to correct the pronoun used. If Severus ever heard that, he would throw a fit at being identified as a girl again. James thought it was adorable. Severus was still adamant that he was a boy if he said he was. James couldn't really refute the argument.

"What's her name? Will she start Hogwarts too?"

"His name is Severus Prince. And no, he won't start Hogwarts until next year," replied James calmly. He was already prepared for the next set of questions

Sirius gaped like a fish. "Prince?! Merlin's saggy balls! You're the one he's betrothed to!"

James didn't reply and went back to running his hands over the black journal. He missed Severus already and it wasn't even half a day since he saw him yet.

"Mother tried to get me a contract with Prince for months! She's spitting mad when he heard he was already promised to another. Do they really have... you know?"

James glared at Sirius. "You can't have Severus. He's mine!" He snarled protectively, ignoring the last question.

The boy in question raised both hands in defense, "Hey, don't worry, I don't want to be betrothed anyway!"

"Good," quipped James. "Severus is my best friend since we were little so it's only right that we are to be wed when we grow up."

After a few tense seconds of silence, Sirius hesitantly asked again, "So, do they have those? You know? The girl parts."

James huffed. Honestly, he was rather tired and annoyed of being asked about something like that. He once asked Severus the same question and that didn't turn out very well for him. If he didn't get a clear answer then no one else should as well.

"I guess. But don't you dare ask him that in his face or you'll suffer boils on your bum," warned James gravely.

Sirius gulped fearfully. He's not sure if James was being serious but he wasn't willing to take that chance.

"Anyway, what house do you think you'd get in?" James asked.

"Anything but Slytherin. Probably Gryffindor. I can't imagine the look on Mother's face when she finds out," replied Sirius with a boyish grin.

That earned a genuine grin from James. "I'll be in Gryffindor, too!"

The two shared a smile and laughed until a knock on the carriage door interrupted them.

Sirius stood to open it, coming to face another firstie with light brown shaggy hair.

"Remus!" James cried from behind the Black heir, startling Sirius in the process. "There you are!"

"You know each other?" Sirius asked in his position beside the door as Remus stepped in to give James a side hug.

"Yeah. We went to the same group classes since we're like 8," replied James cheerfully. "Sirius, this is Remus Lupin. Rem, this is Sirius Black."

"It's nice to meet you, Heir Black," greeted Remus cordially. James rolled his eyes.

"Call me Sirius. Nice to meet you, too," Sirius accepted the handshake with enthusiasm.

The three sat down and began discussing more on the houses and why Gryffindor is the best one. James was ecstatic when he found out Sirius was an avid flier as well. Remus and Severus were very much alike in the sense that they'd rather have their feet on the ground. At least now that he had Sirius to fly with, he won't feel so stuffed when Sev refuses to fly with him. It made James happy knowing someday, he'll get to introduce Sev to his two new (and old) friends. While he's known Remus for some time, Remus never actually met Severus in person.

James was even happier when the three of them ended up in Gryffindor. John was placed in Hufflepuff but James already knew that. The Boneses were born to be badgers. William Greengrass and Jeffrey Macmillan ended up in Ravenclaw, Karfic in Slytherin, and Longbottom and Mckinnon in Gryffindor as well. James, Sirius, Remus, and another kid named Peter Pettigrew shared a dorm.

James wrote to his parents as soon as they got to their room and tucked away the letter to send of first thing in the morning. He quickly pulled out the journal from his knapsack and closed his bed curtains. He didn't want to let anyone else know about it yet.

J: Sev!!!!
S: I assume you're a lion now...
J: Of course! You have so little faith in me :(
S: so much drama
J: I miss you already :(
S: ... I miss you, too.
J: I wish you were born earlier.
S: You always say that...
S: But me, too.
J: I got a new friend, btw. His name's Sirius. And Remus is also in Gryffindor. We share the same dorm along with a boy named Peter.
S: Seems a lot of fun. I hope you aren't spending your first night stuffing yourself with sweets and causing trouble. Your mum's going to murder you.
J: I'm not! I'm here writing to you, am I?
S: You have a point.
J: I always have a point.
S: You'd like to think so.
S: I gotta go, James. Grandfather's taking me to visit some distant cousin tomorrow morning. And you need to sleep early. It's your first day tomorrow. I'll talk to you soon.
J: Awww :(alright. Talk to you in the morning! Goodnight!
S: Goodnight :)

The boy plopped back in bed with a sigh. He wanted to keep talking to Severus longer but knew his betrothed wouldn't dare sleep late especially when he has somewhere to go to with his grandfather in the morning.

When he opened his curtains to see what the others were doing, James found everyone but Remus already asleep. Sirius still had his robes on while Peter simply chucked it off and passed out face down on his bed. The two shared an amused grin before bidding each other a good night.

-

It had only been a month since James had gone to Hogwarts but Severus already felt like they haven't seen each other in years.

Between tutoring and blowing up his lab, Severus had so much time to waste. Before, he had James fill up the quiet spaces with all the chattering and mischief. Now that he had to spend most of his days alone, Severus had a lot of extra time to think through things.

In his mind, James was always his best friend. Even after they're betrothed, it didn't change. No, he wasn't that oblivious to the boy's crushing. James wasn't really subtle. It's just that Severus didn't want anything to change between them. Or at least not yet. What they have together was good. Severus really didn't want to lose a best friend.

He understands very well that their betrothal meant they're going to marry in the future, and he had no objections to that. He rather liked the idea of being with James forever. No matter how annoying he can be, he's his Jamie. The same boy who played trains with him the first time they met. The same boy who messily patches up Sev's knees when he falls down. The same boy who promised him they're always going to be best friends no matter what.

He's only ten but he understands what love is. And if there's anyone Severus loves apart from his grandfather, papa, and brother, it's James.

And now he had to suffer months without seeing James. It was fine when Niko went to school because he can always visit him and Niko comes home every weekend. Hogwarts doesn't allow that. The next time he'll be able to see James would be during the holidays and even that's more than two months away.

He was glad they had the journal or else Severus would really feel lonely. Amelia's a good friend but it's different when he had James. He really liked the stories James shared whenever they wrote each other. He makes it so fun that Severus really wished he's in Hogwarts already. Sometimes he even feels a bit jealous that James now had Sirius and Remus to spend most of his time with. If it wasn't for James reminding him that he'll always be his best-best friend and betrothed, Severus would probably have sulked for weeks.

At least his Grandfather's sympathetic. Augustus Prince isn't blind not to notice the sadness in Severus's eyes. He did all he can to distract his grandson, even allowed him to brew an OWL-level potion as long as he had supervision. Augustus planned to have Severus visit Greece at least twice a month so the boy won't feel so alone. In a huge manor, it's very easy to notice the loneliness. Augustus could also use the free time to work overtime and meet with their barrister in terms of all the engagement proposals that still somehow reach him. He worried for Severus especially when he finally goes to Hogwarts. Augustus has a lot to do before that. He needs to get a private audience with Headmaster Dumbledore to discuss the safety of his grandson, procure some sort of protection for him, and perhaps even talk him into letting him visit once a month. The engagement ring James gave to Severus had protection spells against common poisons and curses. The contract alone protects Severus and James from love potions but it doesn't mean it's not going to happen.

Augustus was admittedly paranoid but no one can really blame him. They were the only Princes left and Severus was the only heir of a long, noble bloodline. Carriers were also lusted after to the point of force-marriages. While Severus is engaged, there are still vile witches and wizards willing to commit despicable acts to ensure a magically gifted heir or a trophy-wife to parade in fancy dinners.

Severus, for his part, started training in combat fighting as well as dueling. He's magically gifted and a quick-thinker so Mr. Clarke, his trainer, didn't have much trouble teaching him. He's a smart kid and understood just how vulnerable he can be outside the safety of the manor. He knew that from the moment his secret was out. He never wanted a repeat of being swarmed by reporters. He's also read the memoirs of the Prince bearers before him. They all wrote about how difficult it was for them to maintain a career because their parents wed them to men who either treated them like fragile little girls or chauvinistic pigs who saw their existence as means of producing heirs.

He'd kill before he'd let anyone do that to him. Since he was little, he knew he's meant to become a Potions Master—the youngest and the best in the world. Marriage won't stop him from achieving that. Severus felt extremely lucky his grandfather suggested the betrothal to James. James won't stop him. James understood his passion even if he didn't share it.

He just hoped it would remain that way forever.

Chapter 14 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/73469088)

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_14_endnotes) .)

"If a man could be two places at one time,
I'd be with you.
Tomorrow and today, beside you all the way."
— If by Bread

"Sev!" shouted James in pure joy, dropping his broom on the ground and running towards the onyx-eyed boy.

Severus was engulfed in the tightest hug James could ever give. They hadn't seen each other in more than three months. He felt it was warranted. Severus wasn't able to welcome him back at the station since he wasn't feeling very well. Thankfully, it never turned into a full-blown fever so Severus was allowed to visit James.

"James," whispered Severus tearfully as he hugged back. "I missed you."

"I missed you, too, dummy! Mum said you were feeling a bit peaky. We were supposed to visit tomorrow."

Severus pulled away with a shrug. "Healer Smethwyck said it was just my body's way of dealing with the change in temperature. Greece isn't really anything like Britain during winter."

"I'm glad you're alright," James leaned forward to press a kiss on his cheek. "Have you seen mum or dad yet?"

The raven shook his head. "Blinky told me you'd be here."

James nodded and pulled Severus back inside the manor, heading to the sunroom where James knew his parents were having tea.

“Mum! Dad!” called the brunette loudly. “Sevy’s here!” James pulled Severus to his side and presented him to his parents like a showman.

“James Fleamont, no need to shout. Blinky already told us,” admonished Euphemia lightly before turning to Severus with a fond smile. She stood and pulled the little raven for a hug, showering his head with a few kisses. “We missed you, dear. Gus told us you haven’t been feeling well. Are you alright?”

Severus batted his eyelashes shyly. Though he’d gotten used to James’s mother’s affection, he still finds it incredibly nice every time. It reminds him so much of his mum. “I’m fine now, Mia. Grandfather wouldn’t have let me visit if I wasn’t,” he replied cheekily, earning him a hair ruffle from Fleamont. “And I missed you, too. Sorry I didn’t visit much.”

“Do not worry about it, lad,” assured Fleamont as he gestured both boys to sit with them. “Augustus said you’ve been spending a lot of time in Greece.”

Severus nodded, accepting the tea Mia offered. “Yes, sir. Papa’s brother-in-law is teaching me how to defend myself with and without magic,” he shared proudly.

“Yeah, you wrote me about that. How’s it going?” James piped curiously. He was a bit jealous Severus was training to duel *and* combat but still found it awesome that his intended was super cool. Anyway, he’s also supposed to start practicing dueling again with his dad. It would be neat to be able to train with Severus once in a while.

“Great! My mentor says I’m a natural,” grinned Severus, beaming up to the adults.

“That’s nice to hear, darling. We’re proud of you,” said Euphemia cheerfully. Fleamont nodded his agreement.

The four continued drinking their afternoon tea as they talked about James’s time in school and how much he liked it so far. For Severus, it felt like he could breathe once again. He loves his grandfather very much but sometimes, he wished for a family like what James has, a mum and a dad. He knew he shouldn’t feel bad about his life. He’s got everything he needed and more. He had a grandfather, a papa, and a brother. Two of them weren’t blood-related but they loved him just as much.

He supposed he’d call the Potters family as well. They *are* family. He’s going to marry James, and Mia and Monty would be his parents too. The thought made Severus smile as he listened to James go on and on about his adventures in Hogwarts.

James and Severus excused themselves soon after, wanting to spend the rest of the afternoon catching up. They ran up to James’s room, laughing when they heard Mrs. Potter yell at them not to do it. James’s room was exactly as Severus remembered. He hadn’t been in there since the day before James went to Hogwarts but somehow, the potions book he borrowed from the Potter library was still on his best friend’s desk. And the scarf he left behind on his last visit was still haphazardly hanging on the bedpost.

Severus threw himself over James’s bed and sighed. James followed, laying next to him. They both stared at the bewitched stars decorated on the ceiling.

“Sev?” whispered James.

Severus hummed.

“Remember what I said back in September? When we said goodbye?” he started.

The raven didn’t resist a smirk forming on his mouth. “Not really,” he shrugged.

James pushed his upper body up using his elbows and stared at the boy beside him, trying to figure out if he should smack him or make him remember. When he noticed the smirk on Severus’s face, he groaned and hit him with the pillow playfully on the stomach.

“Hey! No kisses for you, meanie. You hit me,” complained Severus dramatically, not that it hurt even a little.

“Aww! You tricked me, Sev. I thought you forgot,” pouted James.

Smiling, Severus pushed himself up and leaned down to press his lips onto James’s for half a second. “There.”

“You promised 10 seconds!” he whined pathetically, making the younger boy roll his eyes.

“I didn’t promise. *You* assumed.”

James crossed his arms and continued pouting. He wasn’t exactly mad but for more than three months, it was all James had in mind. Well, not exactly since he had school but it was in his mind more times than it wasn’t.

Severus doesn't really mind and honestly, he wanted to kiss James too but he rather liked seeing his best friend get agitated at not getting what he wants, unknowingly training his future husband not to be controlling.

James, seemingly knowing he won't get the kiss he wanted, sighed and let it go. He's going to marry Sev anyway so they had a lifetime for that. What doesn't have a lifetime, however, was his potions homework. Sev's a sap at anything potions-related and James was not above using his resources.

"Say, Sev, I have this homework in potions and I need help," sweet-talked the brunette, getting off the bed and taking the parchment from his desk drawer.

"What's it about?" Severus asked with a raised brow.

"We're supposed to write no less than two feet on the properties of aconite. I know it's the same as wolfsbane and I wrote some about it but that's it."

Severus moved towards the desk and picked up the parchment from James's hands. It was almost halfway done and honestly not a bad job. He nodded and gave it back to James, moved to the bookshelf where he left a few potions book on and picked up one on Magical Plants and their Properties. He turned for the page on Aconite and handed it to James.

"Here, it's got most of the properties. You've got most of its uses so far but I suggest you include the side effects and precautions when using it. It's poisonous so it should give you enough for another foot and a half," informed Severus with a calm, controlled voice.

James gave the boy a thankful grin and proceeded to do exactly as Severus said, going as far as writing the common muggle symptoms of poisoning. Severus watched James with a fond smile, pleased that though the boy talked a lot about his mischief, he still did well in school.

Thinking his betrothed deserved a reward for his work, when James finished his homework, Severus leaned forward and kissed him for the second time.

James was surprised but instead of freezing like before, he smiled and made sure to imprint the moment on his mind. He wasn't sure if Severus would be willing to do it again.

When Severus finally pulled back, he ducked his head shyly, hiding his blushing face under his hair. He didn't count the seconds but he was pretty sure it was more than ten. They were pressing their lips for a very long time.

James didn't let his intended hide from him, wanting to see Severus's face more than ever. He reached for the younger boy's cheek and cupped his face a little, encouraging him to look at him. "Hey, don't be shy. That was amazing," smiled James adoringly. He felt extremely lucky he's best friends and betrothed to the cutest, kindest, most adorable boy in the whole wide world.

"T-thanks," mumbled Severus shyly, looking up to James's face and seeing him grin widely. James didn't hesitate to kiss him softly on the cheek, making Severus blush more.

The shyness didn't last long especially when James started talking non-stop about the mischief he and his friends got into that he didn't dare mention in his mother's presence.

"You better not be missing classes for that, Jamie," admonished the younger wizard. "If you don't get good grades, Mia might not let you play Quidditch next year."

The look of pure horror graced James's usually cheerful face. "No, I won't! I'm going to get all E's and O's just you wait!"

Severus patted him sympathetically on the back. He had faith in his intended's persistence.

-

The rest of the holiday was just as wonderful as the previous ones. James had given Severus a beautiful self-inking quill and his own extra Gryffindor sweater, thinking it would keep the younger wizard warm while he's away for school again. The fact that it had his house plastered on it was an added bonus. Either way, Severus was grateful. James could give him one of his random shirts and it would have been wonderful all the same as long as it smelled like him. Severus, in turn, gave James a wristwatch with snitches on it, and on impulse, removed the blue scarf he was wearing and put it around his fiance's neck. Something to remember him by.

When James was due to head back to Hogwarts, Severus was almost in tears again. If not for the thought that next time James boards the train, he'll be there with him, Severus would likely have begged him not to go.

After another tearful goodbye, James boarded the train and looked for his friends. From the owl Sirius sent him during the holidays, it seems that his mum wasn't all that pleased of him, going as far as to threaten him of disownment. He wanted to check if Sirius was alright.

He found his friend in a carriage with Remus, already stuffing his face with some of the chocolate Remus brought.

"Hi guys!" greeted James with a grin as he pulled his stuff in and plopped beside Sirius.

"Hey James. How was Christmas?" Remus asked sincerely.

James's grin widened. "It was the best! Severus and I spent every day together. He didn't even go to Greece."

"That's new," commented Remus. He was friends with James longer than Sirius so naturally, he knew more about Severus. Other than actually meeting him in person, Remus thinks he's an expert on Severus by how much James talks about him.

"I wish I get to go to Greece," grumbled Sirius beside James.

"Why? I thought your family is one of those who refuse to step into that country."

"That's why I wish I was going. Better there than holidays at my place."

"You know, Greece actually isn't bad. It's kinda nice there. We went to the beach once with Sev's papa and brother. It was beautiful," gushed James.

"Lucky you," groaned Sirius. "My childhood was spent in stiff clothing and stuffy parties."

James and Remus laughed at Sirius's dramatics. Sure, they feel bad for their friend but Sirius always had a flair for dramatics anyway. They knew he had a bit of fun growing up with all the stories he shared about him and his younger brother. Even if they didn't involve warm beaches and sun-kissed skin.

"Have you finished your homework in Potions and Defense?" asked Remus after a moment of silence.

Sirius groaned loudly again. "No. Professor Slytherin is going to *murder* me."

"No, he isn't," griped James, defending his favorite professor. "Why didn't you do it anyway? It's not like you're bad at Defense."

"I was busy," reasoned the Black heir making the other two boys roll their eyes playfully.

"Defense isn't until Wednesday. You have two days to finish it," encouraged Remus before turning to James. "How about you? You did yours, right?"

James looked scandalized. “Of course, I did. Do you even know how much trouble I get from mum if I don’t finish it before Christmas? *I get no gifts!* Not to mention, Severus would be very disappointed.”

“Don’t you get tired of talking about your betrothed all the time?” asked Sirius dryly.

James shook his head, now looking confused. “Why would I?”

Remus tried to make eye contact with Sirius, warning him not to say anything bad about Severus. James might just laugh it up when they make fun of him but when it’s about Severus they’re teasing, James gets all ruffled up. Too bad Sirius doesn’t have a filter in his mouth.

“You make it sound like he’s the best person in the world,” started Sirius, oblivious to Remus’s sighing and James’s tensed shoulders. “We keep hearing about Sev this and Sev that. I know you’re smitten. I think everybody does. My mother goes on and on about the heir Prince and I come here and you talk on and on about him again. I’m pretty sure he’s not Merlin so why does everyone seem to think he is?”

“You don’t know Severus,” growled James lowly. “You might not think he’s the best person in the world but for me, he is. He always will be.”

With that, James stood and walked out of the carriage, probably releasing some steam.

Remus looked at the confused boy left in the carriage with disappointed eyes. “You shouldn’t have told him that, Siri.”

“Why? It’s not like it isn’t true.”

“I don’t personally know Severus but I know he and James have been best friends since they were seven or something. I know he’s been in love with the Prince heir for the same amount of time. He always talks about Severus. He’s been like that since we first met. I understand your frustration but if you want to remain friends with James, you need to stop your vendetta against Severus,” replied Remus calmly. “He’ll choose him without a second thought. And I think Severus really isn’t bad as you think. Don’t think I don’t see you rolling your eyes every time his name is mentioned. It isn’t Severus’s fault that your mother can’t stop whining about him. It’s not his fault James thinks the world of him.”

Sirius deflated a bit. “It’s just- I wished James would stop talking about him all the damn time. I get enough of it at home. Mother keeps telling me I haven’t done enough to make me worthy of the Prince heir’s attention. I feel like sometimes James is bragging just because he’s betrothed to a bearer.”

“Severus is more than just a bearer,” interrupted James with a frown from the doorway, having heard his two friends talk. “He’s my bestest friend. I promised his foster brother I would protect him with my life. I promised his grandfather the same when my parents signed the contract. I liked him even before I knew he’s a bearer. And even if he’s not, I would have talked about him all the time anyway because for me, he *is* the *best* person in the world. He’s quiet but extremely smart. He doesn’t like to fly but he still joins me in the backyard every time. He’s caring and sweet and perfect.”

Sirius shrank onto himself. He should’ve understood but honestly, he was jealous. Of James and of Severus. They both had each other. James was betrothed to the one person Sirius wouldn’t have minded being engaged to. And Severus would always be James’s first best friend. Sirius was jealous. But that doesn’t mean he’s willing to lose one of his best friends just because he was petty.

“I’m sorry,” whispered Sirius, just barely loud enough for the Potter heir to hear.

“It’s okay,” replied James. “Just don’t badmouth Severus. He hasn’t done anything to you. He’s going to start school next year and I would hate it if my friends don’t get along with my betrothed.”

“Do you think he’ll be in Gryffindor?” Remus asked, trying to change the flow of their conversation.

James chuckled. “I doubt. It would’ve been great though.”

“Yeah, I can’t wait to meet him,” said Remus with a small smile. Sirius nodded along, also interested in meeting the boy. “I don’t understand why I haven’t before.”

“His grandfather is pretty protective of him. It’s usually just me, Sev, John, and Amelia,” shrugged James. “Especially after he was discovered as a bearer. I think they worry about him when he goes to Hogwarts next year. I heard my father tell my mother that Lord Prince was thinking about sending him to Greece for schooling when we were younger, or just home-school him.”

“That sucks,” commented Sirius.

James and Remus nodded in agreement. A magical child in Britain not going to Hogwarts is a tragedy. The Potter heir was glad his Uncle Gus changed his mind. He didn’t want to think about not seeing Severus for a very long time. One school year was enough for him.

Notes:

thank you for the wonderful comments and the kudos :)

xx,
newt.

Chapter 15 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/78771850)

Notes:

Hey! It's been a while since I've updated this fic. I still won't be updating regularly for the next couple of weeks since I've got so many deadlines to catch up to, but as soon as I'm done with this semester's backlogs, I'll be updating more. I hope everybody's okay.

xx,
newt.

(See the end of the chapter for more notes (#chapter_15_endnotes) .)

“He's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same.”
- Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights

Summer couldn’t come fast enough for James and Severus. They continued to talk most nights through their journals, just relaying to each other their days’ events. Severus had thrived in his training and spent a lot of his time buried in books. Amelia comes over once in a while and they would play with the muggle board games Severus got from Prince Alexios last Christmas. He even got to visit Seth, King Andrew’s son, with Niko at his muggle university. They got to enjoy two whole days of muggle entertainment including going to an amusement park. Naturally, James was jealous when Sev wrote him about it, demanding they go to an amusement park when he comes home for the summer too.

Meanwhile, James continued causing mischief in Hogwarts. The three friends called themselves the Marauders, and sometimes Peter, their other roommate joins them. They became known within the Gryffindor house as pranksters. One time, they even charmed all of the Gryffindor girls’ hair to change its color to red every time their house name was mentioned. Thankfully, most found it funny that when the boys were caught, they only got a week's worth of detention.

The fact that most of the purebloods in the school now know that James is betrothed to the Prince heir, many have come to respect him. Of course, there were some who looked at him with disdain and even heard them say he wasn't deserving to wed a bearer. He wrote to Severus about it and was quickly told off that 'no one will ever deserve me than my own best friend, Jamie. Don't listen to what they say. That's what my Grandfather says'. Sirius eventually told James a lot of them were only jealous of him because they wanted Severus for themselves. Sometimes James thinks Sirius is wrong. After all, even Lucius Malfoy was one of them even though he's already betrothed to Sirius's cousin. Surely he's not aiming to wed Severus. His father told him once that Lord Malfoy and Lord Prince have never gotten along anyway.

Not that it mattered, Severus likes him and that's the only important thing. He knew what their contract stipulates. Their contract can be dissolved if they wanted but only after they reach the age of maturity. He's not worried about that because he fully believes that even if he's not worthy right now, he'll prove himself the best for Severus. Not because he's a bearer but because Severus deserves the best. He knew that from the moment he laid eyes on him almost five years ago. And no one apart from those involved in the writing of the contract and themselves know about the stipulation so there weren't much of a chance people will try to woo Severus. Everybody believes their contract's just as ironclad as the ones before them.

James might have been a little bit afraid about Severus joining Hogwarts the next school year but it wasn't enough to put him off feeling excited. He couldn't wait for his friends to finally meet his betrothed, and he couldn't wait for Severus to surprise everyone with his brilliance. Because Lord Prince had been adamant to keep the Prince Heir out of the public's eye, no one really knew a lot about Severus aside from him being a bearer. They never even got a photo of him to splash on their front pages. No one knew just how smart and powerful the young Prince actually was. Many expected him to be pretty but not many expect him to be brilliant. As far as they know, a bearer's ultimate purpose was to breed powerful wizards. James would love to see the look on the faces of those who underestimate his beloved when Severus proves them all wrong.

So when the school year finally ended, James was both ecstatic and disappointed. He really liked Hogwarts but he couldn't exactly say he wasn't glad he'd get to spend time with Severus now. He really did miss his best friend.

Severus had duel training when James arrived in Prince Manor so James had to wait in the Drawing Room. Augustus greeted him but had to leave for the day for another Wizengamot meeting.

It didn't take long for Severus to finish his training and head straight to the room James was in instead of his own. He didn't even bother taking off his dueling costume.

"James!" cried Severus before tackling the older boy in a bear hug. "I missed you!"

James accepted the hug with grace and wrapped his own arms around Severus tightly. "I missed you, too, Sev. You've gotten taller already!"

Severus giggled as he pulled away. He did grow about an inch taller since Christmas. James was naturally tall as a child and they usually have half a head of height difference between them. Now, Severus had reached past James's ear.

"I did! Grandfather was really glad I took after mum," replied the Prince heir. Severus didn't mention no one would ever know if he also took after his father since no one knew who he was. He used to ask his mother about his father but as far as Severus could remember, his mum never said anything about him, only that they're better off without him. He doesn't actually care anymore because he already has a very good father figure in Prince Alexios.

"Just don't grow too tall, okay? I like it when your head goes directly under my chin when we hug." To prove his point, James pulled Severus into another hug and placed his hand behind the boy's head, leading him to rest it on his shoulder. Severus instinctively burrowed his face on the older boy's neck, sighing happily.

"See? It's nice," whispered James, and Severus nodded.

Severus pulled away reluctantly a minute later because he still had to change into his normal clothing. Both boys went to Severus's room, glad that their parents weren't as strict and conservative as other purebloods. Severus knew most would

have prohibited them from coming inside each other's rooms before marriage. Still, it didn't mean he lost all his sense of propriety. Severus wouldn't actually undress in the same room as James. He had a huge walk-in closet for that.

"So, how was your first year in school?" asked Severus when he came back into the bedroom. James was sitting on the younger boy's desk chair, looking at the new photographs Severus taped on his wall.

James shook his head and turned to his best friend. "Oh, uh… it was awesome! Professor McGonagall said I was a natural in Transfiguration. I think I'm going to have an O in that class, DADA too. History is *boooring* and Potions is hard!"

"I'm so glad I'll be going this year," mused Severus. "Also, I already knew you were great at Transfiguration. Who else could perfectly transform a match to a needle before they even start school? You didn't even have a wand until a month before you went to Hogwarts!"

"Yeah, but I'm pretty sure you're going to best me," replied James, not an ounce of jealousy or insecurity lacing on his voice.

"No, I won't. I suck at Transfiguration. Anyhow, I'm just happy you've had a great first year."

"It would be better next year, though! You're coming with!"

Severus sighed contentedly. He just wished he won't be talked about and stared at all the time because of his "gift". His Grandfather already had scheduled a meeting with Headmaster Dumbledore to talk about his condition and the safety measurements Hogwarts need to provide. Severus wanted to be normal when he goes to school. He didn't want to be roomed separately, though that has perks on its own. He heard his Prince Alex suggest sending a guard to accompany him in school like how he sent one along with Nikolaus. Fortunately, Hogwarts doesn't allow a non-student nor non-staff to live in the castle all year long. That would have been quite an embarrassment for Severus. No firstie comes to school with a bodyguard! He loves his Grandfather and his Papa but sometimes their over-protectiveness feels suffocating.

He's not exactly not scared of the prospect of boarding school. He grew up with the knowledge that it's not safe for a bearer like him to live with hormonal teenagers with an unhealthy obsession for power. There were just so many awful things that could happen to him that kept him awake some nights. The possibility of a forced bonding was his most feared. He'd rather die than experience such a thing!

But now that he's already betrothed to another, with a list of protection charms as long as a novel, he's good to go like any other normal firstie. He just hoped it won't turn him into a circus sideline show once he's actually in school.

James did get to go to a muggle amusement park in Surrey with his father, Severus, and James's half-blood cousin who acted as their tour guide. His favorite ride was definitely the second largest roller coaster. It would have been the largest one but Severus had to throw up after they rode it so James immediately crossed that one out of his list. James even got to try a muggle restaurant called McDonald's. It was quite an experience.

The rest of his summer vacation was spent either at home or at Prince Manor. James continued his duel training with his father and sometimes had mock duels with Severus. Those weren't exactly productive since both boys refused to hit each other with bigger offensive spells. He finished all his homework the first few weeks right after school mostly because his mother refused to let him start training without finishing them. Severus helped sometimes which James was very thankful for.

James also wrote to Remus and Sirius a lot. He would have invited them to his home but Sirius was grounded for the whole summer, and Remus and his family were out of the country visiting cousins. It didn't bother James as much as he thought. He's going to see them again when school starts anyway. And both his friends wrote as often as he does so it wasn't that he worried they'd forget about him.

Amelia and John also came to visit a few times. Since the two younger children would be starting Hogwarts in September, both James and John have been teaching them a few things they learned in their first year. They even forced Severus to fly with them, telling him he should get used to riding a broom because he'll have to take flying classes as well. Severus wasn't exactly bad at flying, it's just that he really does rather stay on the ground. He couldn't do anything but allow the other three to manhandle him onto a broom. The young Prince heir was just glad they weren't playing Quidditch.

A month before school started, Augustus and the Potters took both James and Severus to Diagon Alley. They purposely planned the shopping trip early to avoid the crowd. James only had to buy the required books for a second-year student and a new set of robes so he was quick to finish his shopping. Severus, on the other hand, needed a whole lot more. After buying the books and getting measured for the robes, Severus, James, and Augustus headed for Ollivanders. Fleamont and Euphemia volunteered to get the stuff Severus didn't already have from the Apothecary. The young Prince heir didn't need to purchase an owl since he already had one gifted to him by his grandfather when he came to live with him— a beautiful eagle owl he named Yago.

"What if I can't choose a wand?" asked Severus nervously as they walked together to the shop.

Augustus patted his grandson's hair and chuckled. "You'll have a wand, little Prince. Don't you worry about that."

"Yeah, Sev. Oh, and Mr. Ollivander told me that the wand actually chooses the wizard not the other way around," chimed James from his side, swinging his hands all over the place.

"That doesn't help, Jamie," pouted the younger boy. "What if a wand won't choose me?"

"Why wouldn't a wand choose you? You're the smartest, most powerful wizard I have ever met! Bet you'll have a very rare wand. Like Merlin's or-or Gryffindor's!" countered James seriously.

Augustus smiled to himself as he watched his grandson and the boy's best friend and betrothed. He had doubts when he first thought of having James Potter be engaged to Severus, not because he doesn't trust the Potters or think James would be bad for Severus, but because he'll always think no one will ever be worthy of his precious grandson. Looking at the pair now, Augustus was glad of their action.

Severus blushed adorably and nudged the young Potter's arm lightly. "You're being silly, James. Merlin's wand was buried with him and no one really knows where it is. Anyway, I wouldn't want Gryffindor's wand, you do!"

"You're right, I do!" exclaimed James.

The boy's conversation ended when Augustus opened the shop's door. A bell chimed announcing their entry, and Mr. Ollivander came swooping from the many tall cabinets. He eyed Severus for a second before smiling at him.

"I wonder when I'd be seeing you, Mr. Prince," said Ollivander warmly. He greeted James too before turning to Augustus. "Lord Prince, 11 inches long, vinewood with dragon heartstring core. How's the wand treating you?"

Augustus shook the man's hand and replied, "Very well, Garrick. Haven't had a problem since my first year. I'm hoping my Severus here will have his very own."

"Of course, Come along, Mr. Prince."

Ollivander directed the trio to the counter, went to pick up four different wands, and set them in front of Severus. He pushed the first one towards the boy and urged, "10 3/4th inches, walnut with dragon heartstring core. Well, go on. Try it."

Gulping, Severus carefully took the wand and waved it once. A spark of something flashed from the wand and hit the lamp on the far side of the room, shattering it loudly.

"Nope," muttered Ollivander before taking the wand back and pushing the second one. "11 inches, cedar, thestral tail."

Severus tried it, zapping himself once before quickly returning it to the wandmaker. He tried all four wands, and then another four more but none have connected to him the way it's supposed to be. Severus felt disappointed and embarrassed. It was just as he feared. There really was no wand suited for him.

"Don't look so glum, dear boy. We'll find your wand," declared the old man before muttering more to himself and taking boxes after boxes from the cabinets.

He seemed to have found what he was looking for judging by his exclamation of success.

The box Severus was handed was old and dusty, unlike the others he tried. James was looking at him with unguarded excitement while Augustus just squeezed his shoulders in encouragement. Severus carefully took off the cover and set it on the counter in front of him. With shaky hands, he picked up the wand, wishing it was finally the one for him.

James described the first time he held his wand as similar to riding his first broom, feeling the rush of wind come up at him. Augustus would describe his first time as explosive, with a bright beam of light shooting from his wand.

Severus can only describe it as meeting a long-lost friend. It was like he knew the wand, which was funny because it's the first time he ever held it. There wasn't any wind rushing or light bursting. It was simply Severus and his wand.

"Magnificent!" wondered the wandmaker. "I should have known this wand would suit you, Mr. Prince. Poplar, unicorn hair, 12 inches, unyielding— for the pure of heart, and wizard of great strength and strong mind. May it serve you just as well as the ones before you."

"*Wow,*" whispered Severus, gripping his wand tighter.

Augustus burst with pride for his grandson. "If I may, Garrick, you said "just as well as the ones before you", to whom exactly does this wand previously belonged?"

"Ah, this wand has been in the family for centuries, Lord Prince. My ancestor found this in his possessions when he went looking for an old correspondence from a previous lover. It was willed to him by that lover when she died but was hidden for many years due to his wife's jealousy. Since then, we have kept it safe, hoping that one day it would find someone worthy to wield such an amazing wand. This, my friend, was Rowena Ravenclaw's."

"I told you you're going to have a special wand!" whispered-yelled James into Severus's ear.

Severus couldn't imagine holding a priceless artifact, much less actually own one. He shakily placed the wand back on its box, feeling saddened by the loss of its weight on his palm but unwilling to hold it for much longer fearing he'll grip it tight enough to break.

"Are you sure you're letting me have it, Mr. Ollivander? This... this is too valuable for a child such as myself," said Severus. It hurt thinking he won't leave with the wand that felt like home but he can't, for the life of him, just accept something so precious. "There are others more worthy than I am, and I do not want to take their right to wield this one."

James wanted to object but before he could do so, Augustus tilted the younger boy's chin to face him. Severus thought his grandfather would be disappointed that he won't take the wand but instead of dismay, the boy saw pride and awe from the old man's eyes.

"My precious Severus, do not talk as if you are not as valuable as this wand. I am not surprised it has chosen you, for you are indeed pure and strong. This wand is not too valuable for you, little Prince. It's meant for you, and if Mr. Ollivander is willing to part with it, then you shall wield it. I am so proud of you, not because you have shown to us you're worthy of a wand owned by one of the founders, but because you have shown me humility and kindness."

Severus sniffled as he urged his tears not to fall. "Grandfather..."

Augustus knew what Severus wanted to say without actually having said it. He simply brought a finger to brush against the boy's cheek before turning to the wandmaker. "Mr. Ollivander, is this wand available to buy?"

"Of course, Lord Prince. Mr. Prince, your grandfather is right. This truly is meant for you. I've never seen it act towards a witch or wizard the way it did to you," said Ollivander softly. He placed the box cover back on and had it wrapped carefully. Augustus and Ollivander discussed payment for a minute, the former trying to pay more than the latter asked for. James and Severus were whispering quietly to each other, both amazed by everything that has happened.

Mr. Ollivander finally accepted Augustus's offer of two hundred galleons for the wand as opposed to his selling price of twenty. He smiled down at the two boys and bowed lightly towards Severus. "May it serve you well, Mr. Prince."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Ollivander!" beamed Severus, hugging the package gently towards his chest. James beamed alongside him and draped an arm over the younger boy's shoulders.

The three were met by the older Potters near the Apothecary.

"What took you lads so long?" Euphemia chided both boys who still had matching grins on their faces.

"Oh, Mia, I'll tell you all about it at lunch," chuckled Augustus as he herded the group towards the Leaky Cauldron.

Notes:

So, Severus is going to school!! It's kind of obvious which House I'm putting him now haha. He's much better in Ravenclaw than Slytherin anyway.

If you want to ask me anything, I'm on tumblr as newt-negotiation. Feel free to message me for whatever, but please don't send any hate.

xx,
newt.

Chapter 16 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/78969691)

Notes:

I have less than a month left for this semester!!!! I think I'll be able to write more soon, at least for another two months. Have a great day to all!

xx,
newt.

"Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."

- The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost

The sun rose impossibly bright on September 1st. Severus woke up with the light hitting directly on his face. He grumbled a bit and rolled over to his front, wanting to avoid the brightness.

And then he realized what day it was.

Severus sprung so abruptly from his bed that he immediately felt a dizzy spell hit him. He let it run its course for a few seconds before jumping off and dashing straight to the ensuite. They wouldn't actually be leaving for the train station until after lunch but Severus was too excited to wait. He already had his chosen clothing for the day prepared a week earlier and all his stuff packed three times over.

"We're going to Hogwarts today!" cheered the young boy to himself in the mirror.

He finished dressing up as neatly as he could, which was saying something as Severus had always been a tidy child. He wore a white dress shirt over a black cashmere vest, a pair of black dress pants, and his only pair of muggle converse sneakers. A number of purebloods would definitely scoff at his choice of footwear but Severus finds that he doesn't care. It's his favorite pair of shoes after all. Anyway, James had his own matching pair which he'll also be wearing.

The boy met his Grandfather in the Sun Room for breakfast. The older Prince was also impeccably dressed to the nines and had a warm smile fixed upon his face as he watched Severus approach him.

"You look very smart, lad," commented Augustus with a nod.

"Thank you, Grandfather. You, as well," replied the child before leaning forward and giving the old man a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Severus took his seat opposite of his Grandfather and helped himself to some buttered toast with jam and a glass of orange juice.

"Are you all ready for Hogwarts, Severus?" asked Augustus as he, too helped himself to breakfast.

"Uh-huh," nodded the boy. "Missy had my trunk brought down already."

"That's good. Please wear your emergency portkey at all times, young one, and don't forget to write to me and Alex regularly. I want to hear all about your first year in school." Augustus had spoken to Headmaster Dumbledore a few weeks ago regarding Severus's stay in Hogwarts. He's allowed to bring a portkey with him as long as he doesn't disclose it to anyone other than his betrothed. There's a separate room near the faculty quarters available for him that was used by bearers before but it was the one thing Severus was adamant against. Augustus only agreed with his grandson's wish knowing Severus can hold his fight and probably has tons of protective charms etched onto every piece of clothing he has, especially the unbreakable bonding bracelet James gave him when they signed the contract.

"Of course, Grandfather! Will Papa and Niko join us at the train station?" Severus asked.

"They will, although Alex did inform me they'll have to use their disguise. No one knows about our— specifically your connection to the Greek Royal Wizarding Family. We want to keep it that way. They're still receiving threats and don't want you to get used as leverage," explained Augustus. Severus knew about the threats. Of course, he does. Niko's been complaining about having to go to school with two bodyguards trailing behind him at all times. The threats were made by the same people who attacked them all those years ago, which meant they were the ones who killed Severus's mother. Augustus has been helping King Andrew and Prince Alexios deal with them, looking for justice for his daughter's death as well.

It was one of the reasons Augustus was glad Severus would be in Hogwarts for the upcoming months. At least in school, Severus would be out of that certain threats' reach.

After breakfast, the pre-teen made his way to the library. He wanted to double-check if he'd brought all the books he needed. There would be countless nights he'll be spending alone without access to his mini potions laboratory. At least if he brought enough books, he'll last a few months before he'll need to scour the school library.

Severus ended up staying in the library for a few hours, reading a book about Nicholas Flamel. He only stopped when one of the house-elves came to get him for lunch. The Prince heir almost forgot he's supposed to go to Hogwarts later.

Lunch was a somber event, as opposed to the atmosphere during breakfast. Severus found himself not wanting to go and leave his beloved grandfather all alone in the manor. He couldn't even imagine not having the elder Prince join him for dinner.

"What is the matter, Severus?" Augustus could not help but ask his quiet grandson.

Severus half-shrugged before he remembered his manners. "I... Will you be alright here alone when I leave for school, Grandfather?"

"Oh, dear one," sighed the old man with a hint of sadness, "don't you worry about me. I will not be alone. Fleamont will often come to visit, and I will be rather busy anyhow. Now that you're in school, I might even start redecorating!" Augustus announced happily, trying to lighten up the young boy.

It seemed to work since Severus let out a giggle. "Please leave my room alone!"

The rest of the meal was finished without the initial tenseness. Severus's excitement returned full force that Augustus had to grip the boy's shoulder just so he won't constantly bounce on his feet.

Platform 9 3/4 was crowded when the grandfather and grandson duo arrived via floo. Severus had the urge to run away and hide. He's been at the station before, when he went to see James off last year, but actually coming for himself was entirely a different feeling.

Augustus never removed the hand on his shoulder, and slowly led Severus towards the train. At least everyone else was too busy saying goodbye to their own parents to even notice the two. It wasn't until he heard a familiar voice calling his name that Severus was finally able to relax.

"Niko! Papa!" exclaimed Severus excitedly. "You came!" It didn't matter that instead of black hair and blue eyes, he was greeted by two blondes with green eyes, Severus knew them by heart. Although it did help that he knew those disguises fairly well since he was six.

"Of course, we came. It's your first day!" snorted the 15-year-old prince as he ruffled Severus's neatly combed hair.

The young boy grumbled and swatted the wandering hand. "Stop it, Niko. I just brushed it!"

"C'mon *bambino*, you used to like it as a kid."

"I'm *eleven*, now! And you're just four years older than me!"

“Still older,” Niko sing-songed.

Before the teasing turns into a fight, Alex stepped between the two. "Quit it, boys. Come give me a hug, Severus."

Severus did just as the man asked, gripping tightly around the waist. "Thank you for coming, Papa. I'll miss you!"

Alexios bent down to kiss the boy's head. "I'll miss you, too. Don't forget to write, okay? And go make some friends. I don't want to hear you're spending every second of your time with James."

Severus smiled and shook his head. "I promise."

Nikolaus pulled the boy back into a hug and whispered, "If anybody makes you feel uncomfortable, *even James,* tell me, alright? It's the big brother's job to scare all your suitors away."

Severus half-snorted but nodded all the same. He doubts James would ever make him feel uncomfortable but the sentiment was nice.

The train whistled, signaling it's time to board. Severus hugged his grandfather, papa, and brother once again before boarding, promising each one that he'll be careful and will write regularly.

The corridor was bustling with people. He was glad his trunk was shrunk or he would have had a very difficult time dragging it through. He hadn't seen James on the platform and on the train so far so he decided to simply find an empty one. Knowing the Potter boy, he'll be looking for Severus as soon as he's boarded.

Severus found an empty carriage a moment later. He made himself comfortable and took out the half-read book from his satchel. It'll be a long ride, he's heard.

A quarter of an hour later, a knock interrupted the Prince heir's reading. He expected it to be his betrothed but when he looked up, it was a girl with red hair and green eyes. She's already wearing her robes which probably meant she's a muggle-born. No one else ever does that.

"Hi, my name is Lily. All the others are full. Can I share?" The girl asked with a shy smile.

Severus placed his book on the side and nodded. "Of course. My name is Severus. Are you a first-year student, too?"

The girl—Lily, sat opposite of Severus and thanked him, saying yes to the question. When Severus asked where her stuff was, she pulled out a shrunken trunk and told him all about an older couple volunteering to shrink it for her at the platform. Lily was a chatty girl, and in the span of 20 minutes, Severus could probably tell the story of half her life. Turns out, Lily was indeed a muggle-born from a place called Cokeworth. She has an older sister named Petunia, and a pet dog named Bruno. She even told him all about Professor McGonagall's visit to her home.

They were interrupted, yet again, by a knock on the door. This time, Severus was sure it was James judging by the pattern of the knock. Before Severus could greet him, he was immediately smothered in a bear hug, surprising Lily.

"Where have you been?! I've been looking *everywhere!*" exclaimed James dramatically when he finally released the younger boy.

Severus rolled his eyes. "I didn't see you at the platform so I went looking for an empty carriage. And James, where are your manners?" chided the 11-year-old. He sighed when James stared at him blankly before turning to his carriage-mate. "Lily, this is James. James, meet Lily. She's a first-year, too."

James propped himself better once he realized Severus wasn't alone. He faced the new girl and grinned. "Hey! It's nice to meet you! Thanks for keeping Sev company."

Lily seemed flustered by James's presence but she smiled nonetheless. "It's no problem. Are you cousins?"

"Sev! You didn't tell her?" gasped the older boy jokingly. "And here I was thinking you're ecstatic of our betrothal!"

Severus smacked the arm closest to him. "Don't be overdramatic, Jamie. I apologize for him, Lily. His mother dropped him as a baby."

Lily giggled at the quip but stopped halfway when she realized what the other boy said. "Wait... you're together-*together?!* Aren't you too young?!" At least the girl didn't look overly scandalized, just surprised.

James was about to go on a full rant about tradition and family honor when Severus placed his palm over the boy's lips, shushing him.

"It's different in the wizarding world. I've read that in the muggle world, you're not supposed to be spoken for until you reach the age of maturity, or that it's frowned upon to be in a relationship until you're 16. Here, it's normal for certain social circles to promise one to another as young as a newborn. James and I were betrothed when we were 9 and 10

respectively. You'll find that half of the student population in Hogwarts is already engaged to be married," explained Severus calmly. He was glad he'd kept up with the muggle studies he started when he lived with the Greek Royal Family.

Lily looked as if she was having a hard time grasping the difference in culture, but she was raised to be open and nonjudgmental so she took it to stride. After all, she was the one to enter their world instead of the other way around. This was exactly what Professor McGonagall warned her about. She'll have to adapt sooner or later. While she's not exactly happy that arranged marriage still exists, she can't exactly voice it out especially when her first friend in the wizarding world is engaged as well.

"And Uhm... is it also normal for boys to be together? I don't mean to be rude. I had a friend in primary that liked boys, too," Lily quickly added.

Instead of Severus or James replying, a new voice joined in. "It's actually not."

"Sirius!" cried James, pulling the boy inside the carriage. Remus followed right after, looking sheepish at their impoliteness.

"You took off running. Remus and I had to go looking for you," berated the Black heir before nodding towards Severus and Lily. "I apologize for the interruption. My name is Sirius, and this is Remus. We're friends of James."

"Oh, hello. I'm Lily. It's nice to meet you." Lily smiled demurely, forgetting their earlier conversation.

"Hello," greeted Severus as well. "I'm Severus."

Sirius huffed amicably. "Oh, we know. James doesn't stop talking about you."

That made Severus blush and avoid eye contact. He nudged James on the side as a quick reprimand. James countered a nudge himself but looking semi-proud at Sirius's comment.

"Anyway, it's different for these two because Prince here is a bearer," continued Sirius.

Remus hissed at his side while Severus felt himself shrink in his seat. James growled at his friend and wrapped one arm around his betrothed's shoulders. "You shouldn't be announcing it freely, Sirius. It's a private matter!"

"But everybody will know anyway if they don't already!"

"But it still shouldn't come from you," Remus added but with a softer tone than what James used. "How would you feel if I announce to everyone that you're the shortest in our group. Everybody knows it but I'm sure it'll still make you uncomfortable."

"Remus!" cried Sirius indignantly, feeling embarrassed of being pointed out. "Alright, alright. I get it. I'm sorry!"

Remus simply crossed his arms on his chest. "It's not me you should apologize to."

Sirius huffed and then turned to look at Severus, already feeling bad about his insensitive comment when he saw the boy hiding behind his hair.

"I'm sorry, Prince. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable."

Severus forced a smile. He really wanted to tell the boy off but he was scared they wouldn't like him. They were James's friends, and Severus wanted to be on good terms with them. "It's alright. Just don't do it again."

Lily was quiet while the boys dealt with their issues. When they finished, she piped up again. "Ah... If you don't mind me asking, what's a bearer?"

At least this time Sirius kept quiet. Severus smiled. "A bearer is someone, usually identified as a boy, that has the ability to bear children. It wasn't very uncommonly hundreds of years ago but right now, it's very rare. It was why my grandfather had me and James betrothed as children."

"You mean you're a *hermaphrodite?"* shrieked Lily excitedly.

Severus chuckled while the other three boys stared at them in confusion. "I see you know your Greek mythology. But generally, yes."

"Wow! That's amazing," gushed the girl. "I've always loved reading about Greek mythology."

Severus heard Sirius ask James if he knew what they were talking about, but ignored them. The two firsties began talking about mythology for the next ten minutes until Lily wondered out loud again, "If you're engaged, why don't you wear rings?"

"We don't get to wear the rings 'till we both reach 15 during the pre-bonding ceremony," James informed. "Sev wears a bonding bracelet with the Potter crest while I have this," he pulled out the pendant attached to his necklace. It was a small silver circle engraved with the Prince crest.

"That's beautiful," commented the girl.

James beamed while Severus muttered a shy 'thank you'.

"*Anywaaaay*," Sirius dragged on. "What House do you two think you're going to be in?"

"Ohhh, I've read all about them. I think I'd like Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff. What houses are *you* in?" replied Lily.

"We're in Gryffindor, the best house in Hogwarts! But Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff are nice too. Anything but Slytherin," Sirius grimaced at the mention of the snake-inspired house.

Severus, again, wanted to say that Slytherin wasn't so bad. His mother was in Slytherin and she was the best person in the world. He didn't say anything though. He knew all about Sirius Black. The boy had serious family issues he needs to get over with. Severus didn't want to deal with a temper tantrum. It's not like he hoped he'll end up in Slytherin anyway. Before he even got his wand, he always loved Ravenclaw. The wand was just a happy coincidence.

Severus brought back his attention to the group when he heard his name being mentioned.

"Hey Prince, think you'll end up in Gryffindor like lover-boy here?" Sirius nudged James with his foot earning him a scowl.

"I don't know yet," replied the younger boy.

James snorted beside him. "Nah, he'll be in Ravenclaw. His brain won't fit in our common room," he teased good-naturedly. James knew Severus didn't want anybody else to know he had Rowena Ravenclaw's wand so of course, he didn't mention it.

Severus simply rolled his eyes at his betrothed's joke.

The three second-year students continued talking about the houses and all the dos and don'ts that no one ever bothered telling them when they were firsties. It wasn't until a prefect came by and instructed them to change into their robes that the conversation finally ended. James, Sirius, and Remus went back to their original carriage while Severus and Lily stayed behind. The other two boys had to physically drag James out because he wouldn't let go of his best friend.

"I'll see you later, Sev. You, too, Lily!" James had said, leaning over the younger boy and pressing a single kiss on his cheek before running off, causing Severus to blush so heavily he looked like a tomato.

Lily smothered his giggle and laughed even harder when Severus sent her a playful glare. "Don't even think about saying it."

"You're so adorable!"

Hogwarts was incredible, thought Severus.

He, along with all the other first-year students were greeted by a half-giant Severus remembered from James's stories as Hagrid. He led them towards the lake where they were supposed to ride a boat to the castle. He hadn't seen James again since stepping out of the train which Severus realized the older students must have ridden something else to the school.

Severus shared a boat with Lily, a boy named Louis, and Amelia whom he, fortunately, bumped into at the Hogsmeade station. When they arrived, they were once again greeted by another staff, leading them to a grand door. The other side must be the Great Hall since Severus could make out chattering and laughing from inside.

"Are you nervous?" asked Lily quietly from his side.

"Tremendously," replied the boy. "You?"

"Yes, but also excited. Do you know how they're sorting us?"

Severus shook his head. James never told him.

Lily huffed and twirled her finger on a loose strand of hair. "I hope we don't have to take an exam right in the middle of dinner. I didn't even study."

"Oh, I doubt they'll be doing that, Lily. They must have a charmed goblet or something."

They didn't have to wait long for the massive door to open to the Great Hall. Severus had never seen anything so beautiful. The ceiling was bewitched to look like the night sky, and candles were floating all over. If he had noticed anything other than the place itself, he would have felt conscious and uncomfortable. All the students were muttering among themselves, Some were too focused on the new arrival, probably looking for a brother or a sister in the crowd of firsties. Severus only realized they were at the center of attention when the group finally stopped near the head table. He felt himself flush when he glanced around and caught James's excited eyes. He wasn't even listening to Headmaster Dumbledore's short welcoming speech anymore.

"When I call your name, please step forward and I shall place the Sorting Hat on your head so you shall be sorted into your Houses," instructed Professor McGonagall as she pulled a list from her robes and held the Sorting hat with her other hand.

"It's a hat!" Lily hissed on Severus's ear. The boy shook his head and held off a snicker from escaping at the peeved tone of his new friend. He only paid attention again when Amelia's name was called. Severus mouthed her good luck and was returned with two thumbs up.

"HUFFLEPUFF!" the Sorting Hat declared loudly, making the whole House of Badgers erupt in cheers. Amelia hopped off the stool and dashed towards her new House. Severus was happy for his friend knowing both her brothers and his parents were Hufflepuffs as well.

A few more students were called, none of which Severus was quite familiar with yet. When Lily's name was called, the girl let out a deep breath as she stepped up. Hers took longer than the one before her. Severus was curious what's actually happening. He's guessing the Sorting Hat was sentient judging by the expressions on Lily's and all the others' faces.

"RAVENCLAW!"

Lily almost squealed in happiness and quickly went to her seat, catching Severus's eyes and giving him a nod of encouragement.

Severus was one of the last few students to be sorted, his last name being Prince. They weren't very many, probably only about 30 max. There were a few he knew and exchanged polite greetings with as they passed him by when they're called. Icarus Nott was placed in Slytherin, Anthony Davies and Clarence Bell in Gryffindor, and Delphine Jones in Ravenclaw.

"Prince, Severus."

Immediately, the Great Hall filled with whispers and gasps. Severus gulped nervously when he finally stepped forward. He didn't want to look around him, fearing his stomach would twist more than it already did. He's not going to throw up in front of everyone if he had any say in it. Severus knew James, Lily, Amelia, John, Remus, even Sirius were looking at him with either concern or reassurance. Heck, James might have even glared at some of the students for making him uncomfortable.

Severus blocked the noise by reciting the ingredients to Polyjuice Potion, and gracefully sat on the stool waiting for the Deputy Headmistress to place the hat on his head. He wanted to close his eyes to block the people too.

"Ah! Severus Prince, such a fascinating wizard! What a childhood you have! Such love and admiration for your mother, and a Royal Prince for a pseudo-father? Oh, and a bearer, I see. Marvelous! You are capable of many things, indeed. I see power and greatness in your future if placed in one house, happiness and friendship in another. But where to put you? Hmm.. yes, of course. You have an interesting wand there, boy. Oh? You don't want anyone to know? Well, if you're certain... Perfect! There's only one place to put you...

RAVENCLAW!"

The hall erupted in cheers, the House of Ravens louder than everyone else, though perhaps apart from a certain messy-haired second-year in the Gryffindor table. Severus grinned happily as he hopped off the stool. He caught James's gaze again and beamed at him, just in time as his tie changed color to blue. He sat next to Lily and was instantly pulled into a hug. Severus was curious which houses the Sorting Hat meant, but he hoped Ravenclaw was the one with happiness in his future. He doesn't want to think of what would have happened to him otherwise.

Chapter 17 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/85378324)

Notes:

I'm not dead :))

"Don't stay where you are needed. Go where you are loved."

—Lang Leav

Severus, along with the rest of the Ravenclaw first years followed the two prefects who introduced themselves as Penelope Labeu and Justin Farley, as they were led to a trek up one of the towers.

The group stopped in front of a stone door with an eagle-shaped knocker. Penelope rapped it twice before answering a riddle. All the Ravenclaws have to do it as sort of a password; however, they do have an emergency knock pattern to be

used when one cannot find an answer to a riddle. It wouldn't immediately allow access, but the eagle on the knocker may judge if the person will be allowed to enter the dorms. Severus internally sighed in relief. While he's fond of riddles and puzzles, he worries that one day he'll have no answer for one and be stuck waiting outside the dorms for hours.

The sight that greeted the young Prince heir and his classmates was somewhat straight to that of a dream. It's spacious and airy, draped with blue and bronze details at almost every corner without it looking overly biased. It seemed like Severus wasn't the only one who found the common room to their liking, judging by the awe in the faces of his fellow first years, including Lily and Max.

"So, rules," started the other prefect, Justin, grabbing their attention, "No rough-housing in the common room, and please be respectful to the other users. You may do your homework wherever you please, but there's a mini-library through that door if any of you ever need references. The girls' dormitory is through there while the boys' is through here. There'll be two students in a room. You will find your name on the door, and your trunks are already delivered. Classes will start at 8:30 tomorrow but please be ready by 7:15. Professor Flitwick would like to welcome you personally before breakfast. Also, bedtime is at 9:30 for the first and second years, 10 for the third years, 10:30 for the fourth and fifth years, and 11 for the sixth and seventh. Any questions?"

A few hands, including Lily's, were raised. Penelope squinted her eyes as if deciding which student to choose first before landing her sight to Max Scamander, "You, with the black glasses."

"Can we send our letters home tonight?" Max asked shyly, ducking his head when he noticed the attention on him.

Penelope smiled genuinely, "Of course. Those who have letters to send, please approach either of us and we'll accompany you to the owlery. But only before bedtime!"

"Are students from other houses allowed to come here?" asked another.

"Visitors are only allowed during class hours," replied Justin, "By the way, girls cannot access the boys' dorm and vice versa. The stairs are charmed to block you if you try."

Chatter erupted among the group while the questions and answers continued. Severus wanted to ask whether the last rule applied to him since he had both parts, but ultimately decided against it, not wanting to grab attention.

It seemed like he didn't need to ask anyway as before they were sent to find their rooms, Penelope called his name, "Prince?"

Severus quickly raised his hand, to not have her call out louder. Penelope gave her a soft smile and beckoned him closer. Lily looked at him in curiosity, causing the boy to shrug, "I'll see you tomorrow," he whispered before walking towards the prefect.

"Professor Flitwick wants to remind you that you'll be meeting with the Headmaster tomorrow after breakfast," she said, "and since we don't have as many students this year than expected, there's a single room available if you are not comfortable sharing with another boy."

Severus shook his head vehemently, "Uh, no, thanks. I'm fine with sharing, thank you," he responded softly. He actually didn't expect the offer for a private room because he thought it wasn't even allowed. And while a private room looked appealing, he hated the fact that he's going to be secluded and separated from the rest.

"If you're sure," replied the prefect in a shrugging manner, "If there's anything you might possibly need, you only need to approach Justin or me. Your safety is a priority here, Prince."

Severus respectfully inclined his head and sent her a shy smile, "Thank you, Ms. Labeu. I will keep that in mind."

With that, he was sent up to follow the rest of his classmates. He found his name plastered on one door near the end, and it looked like he'll be rooming with Max. Severus instantly brightened, not realizing he was nervous about who his

roommate would be. Finally knowing that it's someone he knows, Severus felt himself sag in relief.

He knocked twice before opening the door to warn Max of his arrival.

"Sev?" the familiar voice called out.

"Yes, it's me."

It was then Severus found his new friend kneeling atop one of the beds wearing a pair of pajamas. "Oh, thank goodness. I was worried where you went. Look! We're roommates!" Max cheered, "I hope you don't mind me choosing a bed before you."

Severus shook his head in return and smiled, heading for the empty bed where his trunk lies at its foot, "I don't mind. Have you written your letter to your parents yet?"

"No, not yet. Are you writing to yours, too?"

The onyx-eyed boy nodded, "My Grandfather should be anxious for my letter, I suppose."

Max then left Severus alone, perhaps to write his own letter, leaving the young Prince heir to gather his nightclothes, change quickly, and brush his teeth. He picked up the satchel he draped on his bed and pulled out his stationery paper and the self-inking quill he received from his grandfather and began writing his letter.

Grandfather,

Hogwarts is truly, for the lack of a better term, magical. I will tell you more about it in my next letter, as I need to keep this one short so I may finish it before bedtime.
I got sorted into Ravenclaw, just like you, Grandfather! I am very pleased with it and I hope you will be pleased, too. James also introduced me to his friends (finally) and while they're a bit rambunctious, especially Heir Black, they seem nice enough. Anyway, I made two friends tonight; a muggleborn named Lily, and a wizard from the Americas named Max. Max is also my roommate, which is a relief. They're also in Ravenclaw like me!
Please tell Papa I will be writing to him and Niko tomorrow night. Take care always, grandfather. I miss you, and I love you.

Your grandson,
Severus

The two boys hastily skipped back to the common room where either of the prefects was waiting. Aside from Max and Severus, three other students joined them in the owlery. Sending their letters was quick, and Severus made sure his owl, Yago, knew to spend the rest of the night in the Prince Manor owlery and return tomorrow.

As soon as they arrived back at the dorms, Severus didn't even have the chance to get a closer look at their room before passing out on his bed.

-

It was only because he's used to waking up early that Severus avoided being late. Most of his classmates were still half-asleep by the time Professor Flitwick appeared. Their head of house didn't prolong his welcoming speech, but rather got them their schedules and reiterated that Ravenclaw is the house of wit and intelligence which means he'll be checking everyone's grades from time to time. Severus didn't mind as much, having been used to his academic and skill progress monitored by his grandfather, tutor, and duelling mentor.

Their schedules were also handed to them and it pleased Severus to know he's got quite a few classes with the Hufflepuffs. He didn't have the chance to talk longer with Amelia last night before they got sorted into different Houses. They have Charms for the first period, followed by Transfiguration, both shared with the Hufflepuffs.

The Great Hall was packed and full of laughter when the Ravenclaw first years arrived. One of the older students laughed when Poppy Clearwater grumbled about it being too early to be lively, casually telling them it only usually lasts for a week before students start skipping breakfast and walking around the castle like inferi. Ironically, this seemed to cheer her up, looking excited as she began asking questions about the said creatures. Severus and Max glanced at each other and smothered their giggling when the older Ravenclaw blanched at her unusual interest.

When Severus glanced forward, he was immediately greeted by the sight of his grinning and waving betrothed. The young Prince's cheeks blushed warmly when the other students looked his way but still returned a smile and a tiny wave towards James. It was only then that he noticed Heir Black looking sullen between Remus and James. It was then he remembered James talking about Sirius's younger brother also starting Hogwarts this year and that Regulus Black was sorted to Slytherin last night. Severus has heard enough stories from James to know how much Sirius Black hates Slytherins, which was a bit hypocritical of him if Severus was asked considering the Black heir has all Slytherin traits except self-preservation. He shuddered to think if he hadn't met James earlier that his betrothed might have hated Slytherins as well. While Severus wasn't a Snake, his mother had been. James would never hate Slytherins in general unlike Sirius because of Eileen Prince.

Severus' attention turned to Lily when she nudged him with her elbow, cutting off the distracted thoughts going through his head.

"What?" Severus asked.

Lily pointed at a strip of parchment beside his cup. "It just appeared out of nowhere," she informed him with wonder in her eyes, reminding Severus that his new friend had completely lived outside the magical world all 11 years of her life.

"Oh, thank you," smiled Severus as he picked up the paper.

It was a simple note from Headmaster Dumbledore wanting to see him after breakfast as well as the password for his office. Having finished his eggs and toast, Severus excused himself from both Lily and Max, quietly telling them where he's headed and asking them to let the professor know where he was just in case.

Naturally, James stood from his seat and followed the Prince heir outside, ignoring his friends' questionings.

"Sev!" called James loudly as he panted a little from the short sprint.

Severus turned around and was surprised for a second before sighing and rolling his eyes. He should have known James would follow him out. "I'm only going to Headmaster Dumbledore's office, James," he intoned before continuing his trek up the stairs.

"Oh," the older boy grinned sheepishly as he walked beside Severus, "I was worried, you know since that Evans girl didn't come with you. Who's that other boy anyway?"

Severus smirked a little at his betrothed when he heard the underlying jealousy from his voice. It wasn't that he enjoyed making James suffer but rather, it was amusing how much the boy tries to hide it knowing Severus hates being considered property. "That's my roommate, Max. He's nice. Did you know he's from America? Oh, and Newt Scamander is his grandfather!" Severus responded excitedly before schooling a much softer expression. "You don't have to worry about him, though. I scarcely think he's interested in all this bearer business. Anyway, you can meet him later if you want. We're going to the library during our free period."

"I'll be there! Maybe then I'll get away from Sirius for a while. He's been a bit cranky since last night. It's getting on my nerves," frowned the messy-haired boy.

"Is his brother being sorted into Slytherin really that bad?" Severus questioned gravely as they stopped in front of the gargoyle.

James shrugged. “Sirius says it is. I try to understand him but every time Slytherin is mentioned he gets either mad or defensive so Remus and I tend to avoid talking about them in general unless he starts it. Well, I don’t think he hates *Slytherin,* per se, only that *his family’*s all sorted in that House.”

Severus hummed in deep thought and tapped on his chin. “He should be careful with how he treats his brother then if he wants to maintain any sort of relationship with him. If he starts antagonizing his brother because of his House regardless of their past treatment with each other then he might as well have pushed him away.”

James’ eyes gleamed in pride and astonishment, making Severus wonder what he said to earn such expression. “You’re bloody insightful, you are. I should probably go now. I’ve got Defense first thing today and I’d rather not be late for that. I’ll see you later, ‘kay?” He leaned forward and kissed Severus on his forehead before running off.

Severus snorted softly. He knows his intended likes Professor Slytherin very much but even James admits the powerful wizard could be scary at times.

The talk with Dumbledore took longer than he expected, and not only because it took him a while to enter the office but also because he got distracted by the phoenix in the receiving room. The Headmaster was kind enough to introduce him to Fawkes which certainly became a highlight of his week.

There wasn’t anything new that was discussed. Professor Dumbledore mostly just inquired about his first night in the Ravenclaw dormitories and his opinions about random stuff. Severus secretly thinks the Headmaster’s a little too eccentric for asking whether he likes plain colored socks more than printed ones. However, he was pleased when he found out that his Grandfather was indeed given special permission to meet with him once every two months in the castle as long as they stay inside the Headmaster’s office. He heard his Grandfather mention it before but until recently, he thought the request would not be approved.

By the time Severus stepped out of the office, the Charms class was already finished. He caught up with his classmates just as they were shuffling into the Transfiguration classroom.

“Severus, here!” waved Lily from the front desk, obviously having saved a seat for him. Max was seated behind her and Clearwater beside him. Severus smiled and all but sprinted towards his friends.

“Was Professor Flitwick mad I wasn’t in Charms?” he asked.

Lily shook her head and said, “He knew you were meeting with Professor Dumbledore.”

Severus sighed in relief. He didn’t want to get on the bad side of any of the professors on the first day of class, especially since Professor Flitwick was also his Head of House. Severus finally let his eyes wander about the room, a curious glint shining through the onyx orbs. Professor McGonagall’s classroom was almost bare except for the student desks and the teacher’s desk. It says a lot about the formidable witch, Severus thinks. She’s probably strict and meticulous, not much tolerant of distractions.

There was, however, a gray and black tabby cat perched on top of the teacher’s desk. Severus tilted his head in interest when he noticed the intense gaze the cat had for the students. He’s read about animagus transfiguration once when his Papa let him browse through the palace’s library. It’s supposed to be a difficult spell to master and requires a lot of concentration. There was no doubt that Professor McGonagall has the ability.

Severus smiled shyly at the cat and watched its eyes widen a fraction before it nodded perceptibly at him. He was then sure he’d gotten it right. He ducked his head and smiled smugly, especially when he heard one of the Hufflepuffs sigh in relief and exclaim— very loudly he might add— that he’s not late because the professor’s not in the room yet.

All the sudden, the tabby cat jumped off the desk and morphed into stern-looking Professor McGonagall. Everybody except Severus gasped in surprise. The Hufflepuff boy was lucky points weren’t taken.

By the end of class, Severus was certain he's going to fail Transfiguration. He might have read books and mastered a bit of the theories and wand-waving but he's never actually *tried* to transfigure anything before. The only consolation was even Max, Lily, and Amelia weren't able to turn their matchsticks into needles themselves.

History of Magic wasn't any better. James had warned him before how boring (*really, Sev, he's like trying to make you join him in the afterlife)* Professor Binns was but he just assumed James was exaggerating.

He was not.

Professor Binns *really, truly* bored him to death. Pun intended.

The worse thing was that they had Double History which meant he had to die twice.

"Merlin! Did somebody die?" asked James as soon as he caught sight of Severus (and his friends) slumped over their books inside the library.

Lily groaned and thumped her head quite painfully. Max looked as if he wanted to be eaten by one of his grandfather's fantastic beasts. Amelia actually raised her head and glared.

"Binns," hissed Severus adorably.

James made sympathetic noises and sat on the empty seat next to the first-year boy. He wrapped an arm around Severus and patted his head softly. "There, there. I told you he's boring. I just didn't expect you to be this burnt out," he said.

"Well, you would be if you had to sit there and listen to him drone on and on about the Goblin Wars for three and a half hours."

James' jaw dropped. "You have double History?!"

Severus nodded gravely while Amelia grumbled under her breath, "Evil, I tell you. Completely *evil."*

"Why didn't you return to your dorms then?" asked James as he peered over to Severus's friends.

The four shrugged in sync as if the thought hadn't crossed their minds. Truth be told, it really hadn't. The Ravenclaw tower was too far away, and while Amelia could have just headed straight to the Hufflepuff common room after class, she was too tired to go further than the library. At least in the library it's quiet.

James could not help but snicker even though he felt bad for the first years. It wasn't everyday that he could witness his studious betrothed all but curse a class. He was suddenly glad he hadn't brought along Sirius and Remus with him. He loves his friends but together, the three of them can be a bit too much for Severus especially when the young Prince looked like he was sporting a massive headache.

"Oh, right," piped Severus all of the sudden and he gestured towards the boy sitting two seats away from him, "James, meet Max. Max, this is my betrothed, James Potter."

James perked at the introduction and stood up to reach over and shake the other boy's hand. "It's nice to meet you, Max," he smiled.

Max smiled back shyly and responded with equal respect, "It's nice to meet you too, James." Severus hadn't actually told him much about James Potter but he knew enough from hearing the others (and his parents) talk about them. The Scamanders might have lived in the States for years but that does not mean they didn't know their history and culture (and his grandfather still reads the Daily Prophet once in a while).

The four first-years and James ended up heading towards the Quidditch pitch some time later. James had taken the responsibility to give his betrothed and his friends the grand tour of the grounds. It wasn't dark yet so James had the chance to introduce them to the Whomping Willow without it being too dangerous. He also took them to the lake and showed them the perfect spots. Of course, he kept the most private of them a secret because he really had planned on showing it to Severus when they're alone.

The five didn't come back inside the castle until after dark— just in time for dinner. With a quick kiss on the cheek and a cheery wave goodbye to Amelia, Lily, and Max, James strolled towards his seat. There were a few upperclassmen who either cooed or grimaced at the sight. Well, most of those grimacing were actually muggleborns and half-bloods that didn't grow up in the Wizarding World. While same-sex relationships are frowned upon by both societies, the magical society is much more accepting than their muggle counterpart. As long as procreation is possible in a union, wixens do not mind. Rather, it's blood that's much more criticized.

Still, it didn't mean that Severus was fine with all the staring and weird looks. It wasn't very uncomfortable yet, considering it's still the first day. He hadn't had the chance to mingle with the others. Even during classes, Severus surrounded himself with familiar people. There wasn't much time to socialize.

His whole week had been much the same. Potions was disappointingly bland while Defense Against the Dark Arts was amazing. If only Professor Slytherin teaches Potions then that would surely be his favorite subject. Professor Slughorn was a bit too sycophantic for his taste. That man wouldn't stop fawning over his family name alone!

When he wasn't in class, Severus would spend his time inside his dorm room or the library. Max was always with him since Amelia also had her own friends in Hufflepuff and Lily had Poppy Clearwater and Isabel Davies. He had Herbology with the Slytherins so he was able to exchange a few words and polite greetings with Sandra Zabini and Icarus Nott. He even made sure to send a small smile towards Regulus Black who seemed to have immersed himself in the company of Frazier, who ironically was the only muggle-born in their year sorted in Slytherin.

James tries his best to devote all his free hours with Severus but he also has Quidditch try-outs after classes. Not to mention, Sirius had been badgering him about "making-up for lost times" which meant he had to suffer hours and hours of hearing the other boy lament about his younger brother's sorting. As much as he wanted to simply tell Sirius to fuck off, he's not exactly that cruel. In the meantime, James would have to treasure eating lunch with Severus at the Ravenclaw table.

Thankfully, most Ravenclaws seem to have adopted him as an honorary member of their house or simply ignored his presence. He couldn't imagine anything like it happening if Severus had ended up in Slytherin. No matter how much the Slytherins honor their engagement, some are still incensed that Potter got the Prince heir. Lucius Malfoy, though engaged to Narcissa Black, kept sneering at James whenever they crossed paths. There's Mulciber and Rosier leading the hate-Potter-club in his year, and the older Lestrange the year above. Even Alecto Carrow had her eye on Severus (which, *yuck*). That girl's crazier than all of them combined.

Not that it's only the Slytherins that hated the fact that James and Severus were engaged. There's quite a lot from the other houses as well, including Gryffindor. There's McLaggen and McDougal in his year (and only because she wanted James for herself), and a few more from the higher years. It wasn't very obvious the previous year since many still refused to believe the rumors. Now that Severus had become a student wearing a bonding bracelet with the Potter House crest, it was no longer mere gossip. James couldn't even bring himself to feel smug about it if it meant added unwanted attention towards Severus.

The best he could do was make sure Severus was never alone. While he was admittedly jealous of Max Scamander at the beginning, he was starting to thank the powers that be of the younger wizard's existence since he hardly ever worried about his betrothed being alone whenever he's not around. He doubts anyone would be brave enough to challenge their engagement anyway. Not when the Prince name holds strong political power in the Wizengamot and the Potters being one of the richest families in the UK. Not when their contract involves pages worth of safety clauses and their bonding jewelries embedded with potent protection spells including one that removes a wixen's magic for a year. It'll be suicide for those who dare to try.

Chapter 18 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/85493995)

Notes:

Sorry...

(See the end of the chapter for more notes (#chapter_18_endnotes) .)

"When we love, we always strive to become better than we are. When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too."
— Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist

It's curious how easily Severus adapted to life as a student.

No, actually, it isn't. Severus had always been good at adapting. He's lived at four different homes growing up, under three different guardians. It's not surprising how Severus managed to make himself comfortable in a new environment even after five years of his grandfather's protectiveness.

The Ravenclaws are very proud of him and the professors at Hogwarts seem to think they have a prodigy on their hands. Two months through school and Severus has already earned himself a quarter of the total house points awarded to his house, most of them coming from both DADA and Potions classes. Even his initial anxiety over Transfiguration had lessened especially when James started helping him study during the weekends.

The whispers and glances had increased over time but fortunately, nothing alarming had happened. There were times that Severus could feel lingering gazes behind him but whenever he tries to look around, he's never seen anyone suspicious. He kept telling himself it's only his mind creating scenarios and he has nothing to worry about.

His Grandfather's monthly visits had been great distractions. Severus knows that his grandfather would do everything to keep him safe. Their weekly letters weren't enough for both Lord and Heir. Augustus would never admit it but since Severus started Hogwarts, the manor was deadly quiet. He hadn't noticed how much his life revolved around his grandson. He, Fleamont, and Euphemia all sit down for tea every other day commiserating their child-less lives.

The first time Augustus flooed in for a visit, Severus burst into tears and clung tightly against his grandfather for what felt like hours. He may have enjoyed Hogwarts very much but as soon as he saw his grandfather's figure inside the Headmaster's office, he thought about how lonely it must have been for the older Prince. They talked and talked for half the day; Augustus inquiring every little detail about his friends and his schoolwork. The Prince Lord was especially glad to hear that James continued honoring his responsibility as Severus' friend, protector, and fiance. He was also happy to hear about his young grandson's two new best friends, Max Scamander and Lily Evans. Augustus made sure to remind himself to owl Newt for tea some time. Their grandsons' friendship will open so many opportunities between the two families

It's all Severus looks forward to at every end of the month.

Of course, when Severus was due for another meeting with his grandfather, there was no doubt that he's much cheerful throughout the day. Even Remus Lupin who joins them in the library sometimes, noticed.

"Are you seeing your grandfather today?" The older boy asked.

Severus smiled and nodded as he packed up his books and notes. He's supposed to head over to the Headmaster's office in ten minutes.

James perked up from writing his Transfiguration essay and nudged Severus lightly, saying, "Hey, tell Uncle Gus thanks for the sugar quills last week."

"You are so spoiled," quipped Severus jokingly. Between the two of them, James always had the sweet tooth. Severus prefers pumpkin pasties.

Their friends giggled while James shrugged shamelessly. Everyone knows by now how close the Potter and Prince families are.

Severus all but skipped his way up the stairs, humming to himself as he waved back at the portraits who waved at him. He was about to turn towards the last hallway when he heard someone sobbing inside one of the rooms. There's hardly any class held on the third floor, which obviously piqued Severus's curiosity. He still had a few minutes to spare before his grandfather's arrival so being the curious child that he is, Severus turned towards the room and knocked softly.

"Hello? Are you alright?" Severus asked through the heavy wooden door as gently as possible, as if he were talking to a wounded animal.

There's a muffled gasp inside and some shuffling before a voice, male and possibly from his year, responded, "I-I'm fine, go 'way."

Normally, Severus would do just that, especially since he also had a very important person to meet in a few minutes. However, the other person's voice sounded so broken, and he remembered how much he used to sound like that when his mother died.

"You don't have to be embarrassed, you know," urged the onyx-eyed boy softly, "My grandfather tells me crying doesn't mean you are weak, but instead, you've been strong for way too long."

The quiet sniffles continued, and Severus was just about to give up when the door finally creaked open.

Nothing prepared the young Prince at the sight of a pair of red-rimmed eyes that belonged to Regulus Black.

"Regulus, what happened?" Severus stepped closer, eyeing his classmate with concern.

Regulus shook his head and wiped his wet cheeks with his sleeves. "Sirius," he mumbled quietly.

Severus didn't need a further explanation. Of course, it had something to do with the older Black. Even after James's and Remus's many subtle attempts of reprimands whenever he goes off ranting about his brother being a snake, Sirius Black still has not seen the bigger picture. Severus would have already snapped at him if it weren't for him being James's friend. Plus, his grandfather taught him better than to cause a scene in public, especially if it's something that can be solved in private.

"What did he do now?" Severus sighed and pulled out a handkerchief from his robe pocket before handing it to the other boy. "I thought he's with Pettigrew this afternoon. James says they're working on their Potions project in the Gryff dorms."

Regulus shrugged, shyly accepting the handkerchief with a shaky smile. "They m-must be he-heading that way. I w-was in the corridor with-with my f-friend when I h-heard him s-say that he w-wished I n-never got into H-Hogwarts at a-all."

Severus gritted his teeth, ignoring the voice that sounded like his Papa Alex to *use your words, Severus. You are not an animal.* He shook his head and stared at his classmate's glum face for a second, before shaking his head again in exasperation.

"Your brother is a bloody idiot," Severus grumbled. He's not exactly stupid not to realize Sirius must have meant it differently. He's pretty sure that even with the older boy's endless ranting, he loves his brother dearly. He wouldn't have cared that much if he didn't.

Surprisingly, it pushed out a giggle from Regulus, making Severus smile. "He's still my brother," Regulus responded just as softly, "Even if he's an idiot."

"He really needs to grow up, though," mused Severus.

Regulus agreed wholeheartedly. "I just wished he didn't hate me so much. Mother and Father were hard on him when he sorted into Gryffindor, but I've always known he'll end up a lion. Why can't he understand I'm never going to be *just like him* ?"

"I don't think he does, really. But who am I to say for sure? We're not exactly good friends to begin with," shrugged Severus and sent Regulus a small smile. "Forget about him, at least for now. You should enjoy your first year like the rest of us. He's either going to have to grow up and treat you fairly or he'll dig his own grave. Regardless, that's his decision. Don't let yourself be used as a doormat just because he's your brother."

One second he's spouting what he hopes were good friendly advice, and the next he's wrapped around a pair of thin arms, the owner's face mumbling thank you's on his shoulder.

Severus patted Regulus's back comfortingly (and quite awkwardly).

The sound of his pocket watch ringing caused the two to separate. Severus tilted his head in apology and turned off his alarm. "I'm sorry, but I have to go to the Headmaster's office right now," he said.

"Oh, it's fine!" Regulus replied, "Thank you for… you know."

"The least I could do," shrugged Severus. Truly, it was the least he could do, given he hadn't done anything before.

Severus waved goodbye before turning and dashing towards the gargoyle entrance. Being a minute or two late was worth helping a new friend.

Severus wasn’t sure how it turned out like this, but he and Regulus ended up spending more time together in the third-floor classroom. Max and James knew, of course. There’s hardly any way for the two not to find out. How could they not when Severus kept on disappearing on certain afternoons? Max found out first when Severus admitted he’d been talking to Regulus Black. James found out not long after as Severus literally cannot keep anything from him for so long.

Naturally, James was suspicious at first. He couldn’t understand why Severus had to keep it a secret from him. It wasn’t like he ever stopped the younger boy from making friends. Well, apart from the one time when he was seven or eight and he got jealous about Severus spending so much time with Niko. He sure got over that very quickly.

With Regulus, on the other hand, it’s different. Not only Regulus is Sirius’s younger, almost estranged brother, but Severus also waited two whole weeks before telling him. That’s the longest they kept something from each other! The whole bearer thing doesn’t count anyway because that’s for Severus’s safety.

He wrote to his father about it and was sent a very long reply about boundaries and privacy. He understood, of course, but that does not mean he’s happy about it. It didn’t help that Severus’s reasons for not telling were unfortunately well-founded so he couldn’t be mad at all. He just didn’t want James to be stuck between his fiance being friends with Regulus, and his own friendship with Sirius. Everyone knows how dramatic the Black Heir is, and no one wants to see exactly that on a roll.

So, James kept it from Sirius. He may be dedicated to his friend but his loyalty will always remain to his betrothed. It’s not hard considering Sirius either only rants about Slytherins or babble about Quidditch (they both earned spots in the team as reserve chasers). It’s almost Christmas anyway, and Sirius and Regulus just might fix their bond over the break. It’s not going to matter anytime soon.

However, they did say no secret remains a secret forever.

Only a week after James decided there's no harm in keeping it from Sirius, he was proven wrong. Just as they were about to head up the Gryffindor dorms from Quidditch practice, the staircase shifted without warning. James and Sirius had to hold onto the sides so as not to fall. It happens sometimes.

Instead of landing right off the tower's entrance, they both landed on the third-floor corridor.

"Oh, come on," whined James. He was already sweaty and tired. They either have to wait for the staircase to move again or take a different route up the tower.

"Let's just head this way," said Sirius, nodding towards the corridor.

James didn't have much of a choice anyway so he followed his friend. Unfortunately, because he was too tired to think, James forgot that Severus was supposed to meet with Regulus again on the same floor they're on.

Sirius wouldn't have noticed anything differently if it weren't for the ill-fated timing of Regulus stepping out of one of the rooms. Surprise was evident in both Blacks' eyes as they stared at each other's gobsmacked expressions.

"Hey, Reg, you forgot yo-" Severus stopped midway when he bumped onto Regulus's back. He looked up from rubbing his forehead and paled drastically. There Sirius was, looking at them as if he wasn't sure what was happening. James stood behind him looking straight at Severus's eyes sending out apologetic looks.

"WHAT THE FUCK?!" roared the older Black, towering not only his brother but Severus as well. Considering Sirius was at least two inches taller than the two first years, it was quite a sight. "What are you doing with my brother, Prince?!"

James felt the hair on his neck stand on end and his blood boil when his friend visibly intimidated his betrothed. He pulled back Sirius on the shoulder and stepped between him and the younger boys.

"Sirius, don't," growled James sharply.

The said boy turned to look at James with both surprise and betrayal. "You're seriously fine with this?! He's your betrothed and he's spending alone time with someone else! A Black at that! Do you even realize how much mother wants to have one of us marry your beloved *Sevy* ?! Blink once and he'll soon wear the Black ring on his finger," he jeered.

Gryffindors are said to be brave and courageous. It's a good trait to live by. However, brevity and courage can also lead to brashness and the lack of impulse control. James is the epitome of Gryffindor. Naturally, he's all those traits combined.

Fury rose up inside James at Sirius's insinuations and the accusation of Severus's infidelity to their bonding that he had not even bothered thinking before his right fist landed on his friend's nose. A small cracking was heard amid the silence making Severus and Regulus cringe.

Even after having pulled a punch, James still looked incensed. He stepped forward once more only to be stopped by a familiar grip on his arm.

"Stop it, James!" Severus implored gravely.

Sirius chuckled darkly as he rubbed at his aching nose. "Of course, you're siding with *him* . Not even married yet and he's already got you hooked? Merlin, that's so sad," he said mockingly. "What do you have that I don't, Prince? Why have you taken my best friend and my brother from me? Oh, right! I have to get me one of those cunts, eh?"

There's a gasp coming from around them.

"Sirius, stop it, please," Regulus whispered from behind James and Severus. They were already attracting an audience and it seemed like Severus couldn't hold James off for much longer when the onyx-eyed boy looked in between crying and hexing the Black heir.

"I suggest you step away, Black," Severus said calmly, gripping his hand tighter on James's arm while the older boy had to close his eyes as if trying to calm himself.

Sirius snorted scathingly and rolled his eyes. "Whatever," he tried to sound uncaring even though his eyes were saying the opposite. He quickly turned around and, like the child he is, ran out of the corridor.

When Sirius left, James's tensed shoulders visibly sagged. The small crowd around them dispersed when they realized there won't be wands drawn out. James pulled Severus in his arms and tucked the betrothed's head under his chin, kissing his hair softly like how his father does it to his mother.

"I'm sorry," said Regulus tearfully.

"It's not your fault," replied James, voice muffled from burying his face on Severus's hair. Severus nodded his agreement without removing his own that's tucked on James's chest.

"But he wouldn't have said all those things if I didn't try to befriend Sev."

"And that's his fault," mumbled Severus, "not yours. He has no right to dictate who you choose to be friends with."

Regulus paused for a second then bowed his head, "I'm sorry anyway. He's your friend. You're all he talks about the past summer break," said the boy to James.

"If he was my friend he wouldn't have said any of that," answered James, equally sad.

Severus shook his head and pulled away to look at the older boy. "He's jealous of me," decided the Prince heir, defeated, "He thinks he lost you to me before, and now I've befriended his brother. He might as well have thought I stole him too."

"Well, that's just stupid. How can you steal me from him when I've always been yours in the first place? He knew you and I had been promised before we even became friends."

"I didn't say he was right. In his mind, it's the truth. It's hard to change someone's beliefs especially when emotions are involved."

James stood his ground, "He needs to if he wants to remain my friend."

"And my brother," piped Regulus with equal firmness.

Severus wanted to say otherwise but was too worn out for any further disagreements. Before the whole incident, he, Regulus, and Max were doing an advance reading on the Soap Blizzard of 1378 for History of Magic. Maybe Sirius would not have reacted as badly as he did if Max hadn't left a few minutes earlier to send an owl to his parents. He found it awful how Sirius's anger was all directed at him even though he did nothing to earn them. It hurt a lot, especially when the older Black implied he only had James and all his other friends because of his status as a bearer. He knew deep inside it wasn't true. None of his old friends, most of all, James, knew he's a bearer before having formed their relationships. Even his new friends don't necessarily care for it nor bring it up in conversations.

Either way, it doesn't have to be true to hurt.

Severus let himself be dragged towards the astronomy tower as soon as Regulus bid his farewell to head back to the dungeons. James still had his quidditch jersey on and a pair of breeches, ignoring the sweat sticking on his clothes.

Severus, on the other hand, couldn't, since as soon as they stopped in the middle of the astronomy tower, he pulled out his wand and muttered a simple cleaning charm on the other boy. James grinned at him unabashedly.

The smile, however, didn't stay for long. James sighed and moved within Severus's personal space once again.

"Are you alright?" James asked softly, carding his fingers through Severus's hair.

Severus gave a despondent shrug, unsure of what he's supposed to feel. On one hand, he's furious at Sirius's words; and on the other, he's relieved that James remained steadfast on his side.

"He's wrong, you know," James gazingly said.

"About what?" responded Severus glumly, his fingers idly tracing the dirt smudges on James's shirt.

James hummed for a second before saying, "He said that it's sad that you have me hooked even before we're officially married. He's wrong. There's nothing sad about that, Sev. It's how it's supposed to be."

Severus was left speechless. He was actually expecting something in the lines of he'd stolen James from Sirius, or that he's only around Severus because he's a bearer. He didn't expect James to point that specific, almost inconsequential detail.

That specific, almost inconsequential detail was what broke down the walls of Severus's *I'm perfectly fine* charade. He gasped shakily and let out a quiet sob as he clutched onto James's dirty jersey shirt. He hated how easily it was for people to view him solely for his ability to bear children— his ' *cunt'* , as Sirius crudely referred to. He hated how fast Sirius was to accuse him of unfaithfulness to James. And most of all, he hated how badly those things affected him.

James swore Sirius was getting hexed as soon as he saw him again for making his beloved cry. Of everyone in Hogwarts, Severus deserved those spiteful words the least.

Notes:

... but hey, it's still pretty much fluff :)

Chapter 19 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/85508620)

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_19_endnotes) .)

"Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone ... just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."
—F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

As soon as Severus reached the common room, Max and Lily came rushing to his side. To his surprise, everyone in their year was waiting for him. Even Caldwell Montgomery who's more often than not seen with his twin brother from Hufflepuff was there, sitting on the armrest looking concerned. It's a bit disturbing how fast news spread around Hogwarts but Severus was too moved by his friends' concern to comment on it.

"I've heard what happened," started Lily before asking, "Are you alright? Should I head over to the Gryffindor common room and hex someone's balls off?"

That earned a chuckle from Severus and the others. He placed a hand on her shoulder and tried to smile. “I’m fine. No one’s hexing any bodily organs, okay?”

Lily appeared put-off but nodded reluctantly anyway. Poppy snorted from the side, clearly not in agreement. “He deserves it,” she grumbled.

Severus shook his head and responded calmly, “No matter how badly he deserves it, we shouldn’t go on hexing him first. If he starts it, then sure. But he didn’t, and we can’t afford to lose points or earn endless detentions over Black.”

Max crossed his arms over his chest and mumbled what Severus thought were unsuitable for polite conversations. The boy then threw his hands up and said, “If I hadn’t had to leave ahead, Black would not have said all those.”

Severus quickly dismissed the idea and told him what he told Regulus a few hours earlier— that it was no one’s fault but Sirius’. And with the most subtlety he can summon (which was close to none but no one pointed that one out), he directed the conversation to the upcoming Christmas break. Even though the others wanted to hear more of what happened, they understood Severus needed a distraction, so they went with it. Soon enough, they were talking about the renowned Malfoy Yule Ball.

The Princes used to attend every one of the parties the Malfoys arranged, but the animosity between Augustus and Abraxas was infamous even during their Hogwarts years, much to their fathers’ dismay. As soon as he became Head of the House, Augustus declined every invitation since then. When Abraxas’s father, Armand, died four years ago, the invitations stopped as well.

Severus heard about them, of course, he had. He just does not care much for it. Unlike his Grandfather, it wasn’t because he hates the Malfoys, but rather, because he hates being gawked at by strangers or sneered at by uppity purebloods. When he was six, his grandfather brought him to one of his business meetings. He swore he’d never attend another one again after realizing why Augustus Prince dragged him out of there not a moment later. Severus knows he was born from a muggle father, and though no one knew who it was, none of those were important to him anyway. He didn’t need a father, as sad as the thought was. He didn’t need him because he already has his Papa Alex. One he has by choice. Whatever his father’s reasons were for not being around was no longer important to Severus.

But it also didn’t mean he’s embarrassed by his blood status. Being half-blood or muggleborn is not something to be ashamed about. So when Lily glumly declared she’s never going to get any ball invites because of her blood status, Severus promptly expressed his vehemence.

“Don’t say that, Lily. Maybe my grandfather will hold one this year. I’ll be sure to invite you. We don’t attend the Malfoy Yule ball anyway,” said Severus.

Lily glanced at him with confusion. “You don’t attend? I thought all the purebloods do,” she wondered out loud.

The others who grew up in the wizarding world looked at her like she was crazy. How can they not when the news of Augustus Prince’s half-blood grandson being a bearer hit the front page? Suffice to say, only Lily and Charles Warren, both muggleborns, looked confused.

“I’m not a pureblood,” Severus said easily, “My real father is a muggle, I believe. I’ve never met him. Mum never talked about him. Grandfather doesn’t know who it is either.”

Shock was written all over Lily’s face. Charles’ as well. It’s natural to think Severus was pureblood, especially when looking at how he acts and regards himself. His decorum rivalled those of the older Slytherins.

Before anyone can comment, Severus added, “It’s fine, really. I’ve got a pseudo father and a brother back in Greece.”

“But… don’t you want to know?” Poppy asked politely.

Severus shook his head and shrugged, “Not really.”

Max raised his hands again to interrupt. Severus sent him a smile speaking greatly of gratitude. “Regardless if Severus does or doesn’t. It’s his choice. Anyway, have any of you finished the essay for…”

“He’s bloody infuriating!”

Severus raised a brow to his screaming fiance. They were sitting by the lake, under a tree, enjoying the quiet weekend. Well, it was quiet before James suddenly started yelling.

There’s barely a week left before they leave for Christmas break. Truth be told, Severus didn’t think James and Sirius would last not talking to each other this long. Even Remus lamented how tense the air in their dorm room had been since the third-floor incident.

“What happened this time?” Severus asked drily. Last time, it was Sirius giving him the stink eye throughout the quidditch practice. And before that, it was Sirius “intentionally” shoving him by the shoulders in the corridors.

Really, they’re a bunch of juveniles.

James stopped throwing stones on the lake and turned sharply to Severus, face expressing extreme displeasure. “He’s been talking to Peter about me betraying him because I sided with you,” he complained.

Severus can’t help but smile slightly at the sight of his adorably angered betrothed. “Well, you did side with me, though,” he commented easily.

“That’s not the point!” cried James, throwing another bigger stone. The water splashed far, some of the droplets reached Severus’s trousers.

Severus closed his book (after sticking a bookmark on it, of course) and reached for James’s arm. “What are you really angry about, Jamie?” Severus asked softly.

The older boy’s shoulder slumped. He tucked his legs to his chest and sighed. “I didn’t betray him, Sev,” James said, a sullen look on his face.

“He thinks you did.” *because you took my side. You punched him for me.*

“But is that really betrayal? Isn’t what he did a betrayal to me as well? He promised not to say anything bad about you and to you. He knew I wouldn’t stand for it. He should have understood how important you are to me. You are my best friend and my betrothed.”

And that’s the gist, wasn’t it? Thought Severus. *That I’m more important than him.* From what he gathered from Regulus, the Black brothers didn’t have many friends growing up. James must have been a gift from the powers that be in Sirius’s mind. He’s gotten too attached to James, and when Severus came to Hogwarts, he felt threatened. It was obvious even on the train ride to school. The fact that Severus became friends with Regulus, who’s in fact the only friend Sirius had before Hogwarts, Sirius must have felt undeniably cheated.

“I’m still very angry at him for everything he said about you,” added James firmly.

“But you miss him,” concluded Severus with a gentle, understanding voice.

James’s silence was enough of an answer. The brunette turned his gaze towards the freezing water. “I mean it, Sev. If he doesn’t change his tone, I’m not staying friends with him,” James said a moment later, not bothering to correct the

younger boy's conclusion.

Severus knew James meant it. The Potter heir has never done anything otherwise when it comes to Severus. But he sincerely hopes it won't be the case. He might not like Sirius, but he also knows James really did consider Sirius one of his best friends. He hated the fact that James had to sacrifice his friendship with the Black heir just because he was mean to Severus.

"He'll change," claimed Severus confidently.

James snorted as if he can't believe Severus even said that. "What makes you so sure, huh?" he teased.

The onyx-eyed boy bumped the other's shoulder mildly. "He'll want to remain friends with you. He'll apologize."

James let out a huge breath, "I do hope so, but I also hope he'll apologize not because he wants to stay my friend but because he knows what he said was wrong."

Severus hopes so, too.

The two boys went back inside before it got colder. Dinner won't be for another 3 hours, so Severus decided to spend the rest of his afternoon inside the library. James had to go back to his room— something about sleeping off until Christmas.

He thought about asking Lily, Max, or Amelia to accompany him but the library is much closer than any of the dormitories. He's due for some alone time anyway. Plus, it'll be much quieter without Lily's mutterings when she reads, or Max's constant shifting on his seat, complaining about the uncomfortable chairs in the UK.

The library was almost deserted when Severus arrived. Apart from a few older students doing their homework, there's hardly anyone else.

He made his way to their usual table by the big window facing the quidditch pitch and pulled out the same book he was reading on the lake earlier. He stayed there, reading for an hour in complete silence when suddenly, he noticed someone standing in front of him, on the opposite side of the table.

Reluctantly, he glanced up to ask if they needed something. He was surprised to come face to face with no other than Lucius Malfoy, a 5th year Slytherin.

"Heir Prince," greeted the older teen, his long hair neatly tied behind him and looking very regal.

Severus returned the greeting just as politely. "What can I help you with, Heir Malfoy?" He inquired, not letting any expression show on his face. It won't do if Malfoy knows how much he intimidated the young Prince.

Malfoy pulled out a black envelope from his coat's pocket and placed it carefully on the table before taking a step back and standing proudly. "My father wants to give this to your Grandfather. It's an invitation to our Annual Yule Ball. He wishes for your attendance."

Severus inclined his head in thought without moving to pick up the invitation. "That is surprising," commented the boy neutrally, "I will be sure to deliver it to my Grandfather, then." He wondered why it had to be delivered through him, though. All previous invitations were normally delivered by owls, and directed to Augustus Prince himself.

Lucius seemed pleased with his answer and bid him a rather excessive farewell, leaving a confused Severus staring at the innocent-looking envelope.

Why had Lord Malfoy sent the Princes invites to the ball when he knew for a fact Abraxas Malfoy loathed his grandfather? And why deliver it through his son? If it weren't for Lucius being already betrothed to Narcissa Black, and

Severus betrothed to James, Severus would have assumed Lord Malfoy's trying to butter him up for a marriage contract.

He pulled out his wand and subtly checked for any charms and curses on the invitation. Even though he'd seen Lucius hold it with his bare hands, he can't really trust them at face value.

Finding none so far, he picked it up carefully and placed it inside his satchel. As much as he'd like to open it himself and read the contents, he'd rather deliver it straight to his grandfather. Augustus will know what to do with it. And anyway, he's seen some of the old invitations. There's nothing special about them apart from some fancy gold writings.

Deciding he'd stayed long enough inside the library, Severus packed up his things and strolled out the quiet hall. When it isn't chaotic and full of students, Severus found that the castle feels very much alive. There's something quite mesmerizing about the ancient walls and the cold, hard floors that makes tapping sounds at every step he makes. The portraits beaming at him from the frames they hang from, the gentle movement of the stairs, the echoing of laughter all over the corridors.

He's suddenly very glad he wasn't sent to Greece for schooling instead. Apart from being close to James, this was something Severus won't trade for anything— the feeling of the castle's excess magic seeping through his skin.

He'll miss it when he heads home for Christmas. He wonders if everyone feels the same. Maybe they do; maybe they won't. Maybe some of those who'll stay in the castle for the holidays will wish they'll have the chance to miss it, and maybe some of those that go home will wish they don't.

The whistling of the train called all those bound for Platform 9 ¾.

Severus, Max, Lily, and Amelia quickly went looking for an empty carriage. He hadn't seen James yet, nor Remus or the Black brothers.

John, Amelia's brother, passed by them and guided them to an empty one beside the one he and his friends claimed. Though John played with them a lot as a kid, he started acting very grown-up when he began at Hogwarts which annoyed both Severus and Amelia, as he kept ruffling both their hairs.

"Merlin, I can't wait to sleep in my own bed!" Max announced loudly, plopping on one of the benches.

Severus sat gracefully opposite of him and asked, "Are you still visiting over the break?"

Max scoffed, "Of course! Dad told me from his last letter that granddad's having tea with yours every other week."

"I heard," nodded Severus, then turned his attention to the only muggleborn in their group. "What about you, Lily? Had you asked your parents yet?"

Lily shook her head. "I'll ask them tonight. I couldn't send an owl last week since mum, dad, and Petunia were out visiting cousins in Devon. They don't know I'm a witch, and owls are rather conspicuous messengers."

"Alright. I hope they'll let you come. I want to show you my potions lab. Grandfather built it for me when I was six."

The carriage door swung open, revealing a ruffled James. If Severus had to guess, James must have left packing last minute again.

"Where's Remus?" Amelia asked, purposely leaving Sirius out of the question.

James entered the carriage and sat in the empty space next to Severus. "With Sirius and Peter," he replied. "I didn't want him to choose between us."

Severus patted his hand comfortingly. It's still a sore subject for James.

“Anyhow,” drawled Amelia on the side, prolonging the y’s in an obvious attempt to change the topic. “I don’t know about any of you, but as soon as I’m back home, I’m going to beg mum for the Nimbus 1001 this Christmas.”

Severus drowned out the conversation and settled comfortably by the window. He’s not a little bit interested in broomsticks unlike the rest of them. Even Lily joined in the enthusiasm. He hopes James won’t ask for them too, which is seemingly moot at this point when he looks positively eager to discuss them. He’s not going to spend his holiday break begging off flying with the older boy.

Severus hadn’t noticed having fallen asleep but woke up to someone shaking him lightly.

“Sev, we’re here,” James whispered.

The younger boy rubbed his fist over his eyes and took the hand offered to him, helping him stand. Lily and Amelia were already outside the carriage, talking to another Hufflepuff girl. Max was standing by the door, waiting for Severus and James.

Severus grabbed his satchel from the bench and followed James a bit groggily. Thankfully, the corridor wasn’t packed so they were able to step out of the train quite easily.

Finding their families was harder, though. While the corridor was vacant, the station was completely packed. Severus had forgotten that part.

He found his grandfather waiting for him by a post accompanied by James’s parents. Well, it was more like they found him, as Aunt Mia had been calling their names rather loudly.

“Oh dear, look at both of you,” cooed the woman, pulling the two boys in for a hug.

“Muuum,” whined James, though he did not pull away.

Severus giggled beside him and hugged the woman tighter to recompense for James’s lack of affection.

“Come, now, Mia. Let the boys go,” her husband chided.

Euphemia Potter reluctantly released her hold on the children, giving the two men their chance to say their hellos.

Severus came up to his grandfather and wrapped his arms around the old man’s waist, breathing in the scent of old books and peppermint tea. “Right!” he perked up and pulled away. “I’d like to introduce you to my friends,” Severus said happily. He glanced around in search of the others, immediately landing his gaze on Lily and two older people, most likely her parents.

Lily waved at him and pulled her parents towards their position.

“Mum, Dad, this is Severus. He’s my friend,” the red-haired girl proudly introduced.

Lily’s parents had warm smiles on their faces as they said their hellos, thanking him for befriending their daughter.

“I’m happy to be your daughter’s friend, Mr. and Missus Evans. I’d like to introduce you to my grandfather, Augustus Prince, my betrothed, James Potter, and his parents, Fleamont and Euphemia Potter,” he gestured towards the particular people.

Lily must have already told them about Severus and James because they didn't react too obviously. They simply smiled at him and shook the hands of the older people.

The Evanses didn't stay for long, explaining they left their 13-year-old daughter in the car waiting for them.

Before Severus could go looking for Max, Augustus placed his hand on his shoulder and shook his head, eyes twinkling in amusement.

"I assume you are searching for the Scamanders?" Augustus questioned his grandson who nodded in return. "They must have left already. I, for one, know their portkey leaves before lunchtime."

"Really?"

"Yes, I talked to Dorian while we were waiting for the train to arrive. They're visiting his great aunt Queenie in America today, I believe," mused Lord Prince softly.

Severus looked disappointed but nodded nonetheless. He supposed it's fine. Max will come visit the Prince Manor anyway.

With that, the two closely-knit families portkeyed back to Potter Manor, much to Severus's surprise. Fleamont had insisted they have lunch together and prepared a feast ahead of time.

Both James and Severus attacked their meals with appetites fit for growing boys. While the elves at Hogwarts make delicious and filling meals, it's Lord Potter's cooking that always gets the children eating like monsters.

In no time, the four wixens were satisfied. Just as James was about to excuse him and Severus from the table, Augustus started to talk. "I received an invitation from Malfoy," the old man said, glancing down at Severus for a second.

Fleamont's brows were almost up to his hair with how high he raised it.

Augustus nodded as if understanding what his good friend was saying without words. "I know."

"Will you be attending then?" Euphemia asked.

"Of course not."

"Why?" It was Severus who asked this time, causing three adult gazes to snap in his direction.

Augustus sighed. While there was nothing but curiosity in the child's eyes, it didn't stop him from thinking that Severus may want to go.

"Because Lord Malfoy does not do anything without reason, young man. I shudder to think what he has in mind that he deem to include you in his machinations. Inviting us is one thing, but using his son to deliver it through you is another."

"Malfoy approached you?" hissed James beside him, promptly shushed by his mother.

Severus ignored his betrothed for the time being and focused on his grandfather's words. He thought as much, finding the action odd as well.

However, Lucius Malfoy was courteous so Severus hated thinking ill about him, especially when he didn't know the older boy enough to form an opinion. Besides, it wasn't like the Slytherin approached him by his own decision. He was clearly ordered by his father.

Apparently, James thought differently. Shortly after they were allowed to leave the table, James hogged Severus for information. He wanted to know *exactly* what Malfoy had said, when and where this incident occurred, and why Severus

didn't tell him.

"I forgot, okay? It was just an invitation, James," Severus tried to reason with the ridiculous boy.

"It's not *just* an invitation and you know it," responded James, equally irritated.

Severus crossed his arms over his chest and stared at his betrothed. "What was I supposed to do then? You and I both know it is not becoming for an heir of a Noble and Most Ancient House to refuse an invite from another Noble and Most Ancient House in their face, no matter if one truly accepts them."

James pushed his fingers through his hair in exasperation. Merlin and Morgana, sometimes, Severus's manners infuriate the hell out of him. "Seriously, Sev," he started, but then let out a huge breath. "Just… next time, please tell me if he tries to approach you again. I worry, alright?"

Finding nothing wrong with the logic, Severus simply nodded. Honestly, he really did forget about it and only remembered when his grandfather mentioned it during lunch.

"Why are you worried anyway?" questioned the younger boy softly. "It's not like he can do anything to me."

"There are many things a Malfoy can do, Severus," was James's only response.

That's true, thought the Prince heir *, but nothing concerning him personally . The Princes' power and connections, perhaps, but not* him. *Well, maybe there is one thing…*

"Are you worried he's planning to sabotage our betrothal?" asked Severus slowly.

The look on James's eyes spoke volumes.

Severus shook his head, "But he's marrying Narcissa Black, isn't he?"

"The Princes have equal, if not higher, standing than the Blacks, Sev, especially since Narcissa Black is only the 5th heir to the seat. Sirius even told me before that the only reason Abraxas Malfoy accepted a deal with Cygnus Black was because Lucius asked for it. If Lord Malfoy decides his son not to marry Narcissa, Lucius will have no choice but to follow. A man like him won't care if it's improper or strictly against the law if it means he becomes the most powerful wizard in Britain."

"I'm not even a pureblood, Jamie."

"It won't matter, Sev. You are a Prince and you are a bearer. For power-hungry wizards, that's equivalent to gold."

Severus sat there quietly, processing everything that's thrown at him. He glanced back at James hesitantly and asked, "How do you know all of these?"

James sighed and sat next to the onyx-eyed boy. "Sirius mastered the art of eavesdropping at a young age. It's how he knew his parents wanted him or Regulus to marry you so badly."

It was a testament to how serious James was that he didn't even stutter at the name of his ex-friend nor the fact that his said ex-friend was supposed to court his betrothed.

It's all so confusing and schemy that Severus wanted to bury his head on the ground. It was just an invitation, and now he's been told it's a plot to steal their power? His Grandfather warned him enough. He's aware of the danger he's living in. But as a child completely sheltered within the walls of the manor, being aware of it and actually living it is wholly different.

"You're not with me because of it, are you?" Severus whispered through the silence.

James caught his face between his palms and stared directly at Severus's sad eyes.

"Never," he proclaimed.

Notes:

This version of Severus does not have the same level of distrust and wariness of the people around him as the canon Severus. First of all, he did not grow up in a harsh environment to develop them. He's young and a little naive, but ultimately kind and respectful. Adorable Severus makes me want to just eat him up *nom nom*

James is understandably a bit more cautious since he's drilled it in his mind to protect Severus. Ever since he found out that Severus is a bearer, he made it his mission to read as many books about them, including the biographies of those bearers before Severus. Besides, he started Hogwarts a year earlier. He had to have heard whispers and rumors of threats to their union.

Chapter 20 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/88381216)

Notes:

was supposed to upload this last Christmas but didn't. hey, at least there's a new albeit short chapter before the year ends! 2021 sucks. I hope 2022 won't.

have a nice day xx

"Waiting is painful. Forgetting is painful. But not knowing which to do is the worst kind of suffering."
— Paulo Coelho, By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept

Lily wasn't able to visit on the 22nd. Unfortunately, her parents already planned a holiday trip to France months ago and wanted to surprise her when she got home. They left three days ago.

So, apart from the usual group composed of James, Severus, Amelia, and John, Max had also joined them. James actually invited Remus along, but he suddenly got sick *again* so that's a bum.

It wasn't a formal event, or even a real one, but Augustus Prince decided to indulge the children and had the elves prepare a feast for them. He even went as far as to have the sunroom decorated like a party. His grandson's beaming smile was worth it.

"Hey, Severus, I heard from mum you got an invite to the Malfoy Yule Ball," said Amelia loudly in between munching some muggle crisps. The Boneses attend every year and she was hoping she'd at least have Severus to suffer with her for a night. She didn't want to spend the whole ball attached to her older brothers again, even if one of them was currently sitting beside her.

Severus glanced at James for a second before focusing back and responding, "Actually, Grandfather and I will be spending Christmas and Boxing day in Greece this year."

"And I'll be joining them for Boxing day," added James happily.

Amelia's shoulders slumped in disappointment. "That's too bad," she said in response to Severus's statement rather than James.

"Eh," shrugged John nonchalantly. "Greece is a hundred times better than stuffy Malfoy Manor, that's for sure. If I had the choice, I'd take that in a second."

Amelia rolled her eyes while Max and Severus giggled. James just agreed with his classmate wholeheartedly. Fortunately for James, his parents stopped attending the Yule Ball at the same time as the Princes. He'd rather spend the holidays flying with Niko and getting sand between his toes.

"How about you, Max?" Amelia asked. "Are you spending the rest of the Holidays here?"

The said boy perked and shook his head, "Nah. Dad's taking me and my sister to Mexico. There's a sighting of a thunderbird over there and they're calling him to check it out."

Severus and Max began discussing the rare creature enthusiastically, leaving the non-Ravenclaws simultaneously sighing. They know once the two (three, if Lily's around) start talking about anything, really, they won't stop for at least half an hour.

It's a good thing the Prince elves prepared more than enough food to keep them occupied.

“Papa! Niko” cried the onyx-eyed boy in excitement, uncaring of the grip his grandfather had on his shoulder. The portkey had them both feeling a bit disoriented and Augustus didn’t want his grandson falling on his face in his eagerness.

“Easy, young man,” chided the old Lord.

Severus grinned up but ultimately ignored his grandfather, shrugging his hold carefully and running into the arms of the Greek prince. Alexios immediately gathered the growing boy in his arms and kissed the top of his head. Nikolaus had the brightest smile on his face beside him, bouncing on his heel and waiting for his turn to fuss over his brother.

“I missed you,” said Severus gravely, tightening his grip on his pseudo father's shirt.

“I missed you, too, dear one,” responded Alex just as sincerely. “I believe someone else wants their own hug,” he added, gesturing towards the 15-year-old.

Severus gasped like he's 6 years old again and jumped into Niko's arms. At 15, Nikolaus already stands at 5'9 while Severus is a bit on the smaller size of 4'5, as he hadn't had his growth spurt yet.

"Hey, bambino," cooed Niko softly, smiling into Severus's hair. It's been months since he last saw his brother, and though they owl each other often enough, he still misses him a lot.

Severus beamed, too happy to complain about the pet name. "I've got loads to tell you," informed the boy excitedly.

Niko nodded his head along, content to indulge Severus for the time being.

Severus didn't have the chance to start, though, as Augustus and Alex came up to them right after they had their own greetings.

"Come," instructed Prince Alex, "we'll have tea inside."

While Augustus and Alexios caught up with each other over tea, Severus and Nikolaus were also having their own private conversation on the other side of the room. When Severus told his brother about Sirius, suffice to say, the Greek prince was less than happy. He made the younger wizard promise to owl him if Sirius acts up again. Niko might not be familiar with Sirius Black, but that won’t matter if he continues to bully Severus. Niko, though only a few years older than Severus, will do just about anything to make his brother happy and safe.

Niko understood why Severus had to go to Hogwarts and not the Royal Academy of Sorcery like he does, but that does not mean he does not resent it sometimes. If his brother only attended the Academy, no witch or wizard would ever have spoken hurtful words at Severus. He would be honored and treated like the prince he is, regardless of his non-blood relation to the Royal Family. Severus would have been very well protected. Niko himself would make sure of it.

However, Hogwarts was miles away and out of his reach. He had to trust James to protect his brother for him. Judging by Severus's guilt of the broken friendship he'd caused, Niko was at least confident that the Potter heir had done his job well.

He reminded himself to talk things over with James when he comes to visit the following week, just to make sure Severus wasn't keeping anything that might pose a threat to him.

Christmas in Greece was amazing as usual. Severus woke up to Niko pulling his bed covers off and somehow dragging him downstairs. Never it be said that teenagers don't feel the Christmas spirit anymore.

They weren't allowed to open any of the gifts before breakfast, though, so the two boys reluctantly sat down with Augustus, Alex, and King Andrew, the Queen, and their son, Prince Seth at the table. The food was delicious, obviously, but Severus was too excited about opening his presents to dwell on it.

When finally released from the table, Severus checked under the tree and began distributing the gifts to their recipients; a task he's very much happy to comply with. He turned to his pile as soon as he finished and grinned widely when he saw he received one each from his new friends.

Lily had given him three different muggle books authored by Charles Dickens. Severus only ever read Oliver Twist but he loved it a lot so he's quite excited to read the new ones. Max had sent him a quill made from the feather of an Augurey. Regulus sent a blue and gray cashmere scarf. Even Remus gave him a whole box of dark chocolate truffles, which admittedly Severus finished before the day ended.

Some of Niko's cousins from Italy also visited in the afternoon and showered him with gifts. One aunt, in particular, doted on him enough that everyone had to keep themselves from laughing out loud at the sight of Severus's alarmed face when he received a trolley full of presents.

"Sofie, what's all these?" Alex asked his sister-in-law with an amused smile.

Sofia Catherine de' Medici regarded the prince with a raised brow. "Why, these are for Severus, of course," she responded primly. "I haven’t seen him since Nikolaus’s 13th birthday, might I add is your fault for the lack of invitation whenever he comes to visit. You can’t expect me to arrive with only one present in hand.”

Before Alex could open his mouth to defend himself, Severus crossed the room and hugged the formidable witch. “Thank you, Auntie Sofie,” he softly said.

The smile on the woman turned brighter and her gaze on the boy was warm. “You are most welcome, dear one. You best not forget to owl me sometimes, you hear? I don’t get to see you as often as my dear brother-in-law and nephew.”

“I promise,” vowed Severus, pulling back from the hug.

By the end of the day, Severus had not only acquired years' worth of presents but also ended up promising more owl commitments than necessary.

It warmed his heart to a degree— that though he wasn’t related to any of them by blood, he was always considered a family.

Naturally, Augustus had noticed the happiness coming out of his grandson throughout the day. He was glad he and Alex decided to take Severus out of Britain for the holidays. Like him, Alex also worried about Abraxas Malfoy's motives for inviting the Princes when Augustus told him about it. What better way to turn down an invitation than politely saying they're not going to be in the country for the holidays? That way, Abraxas can't accuse him of purposely insulting the Malfoy name.

The very next day, James and his mother arrived. Unfortunately, Fleamont wasn't able to join them due to a mishap in one of the potions lab. It's the holidays and Fleamont didn't want to bother his employees to deal with a pixie infestation.

Nevertheless, Severus was glad James and Aunt Mia had come to visit, even only for two days.

As much as Severus hated leaving Greece, he was also excited to go back to Hogwarts.

Like the last train ride, Severus, James, Max, Lily, and Amelia shared a carriage. This time, however, Remus had joined them halfway through the trip, much to James's surprise. Remus explained he got tired of Sirius's sullen and snappy attitude for the past hour and a half. James was worried it would cause a bigger rift between them but Remus assured him Sirius knew why he left their carriage. He actually had Sirius's 'permission' to spend the rest of the train ride with James.

By the time they reached Hogwarts, none of the initial worries remained in James. Everyone in the carriage was happy to be back in school, even though none but Lily and Severus are actually excited about the *schoolwork.*

Dinner was a boisterous event. There were even a few students exchanging gifts over the table, perhaps unable to send them during the break. And to everyone's delight, Headmaster Dumbledore announced that homework deadlines are postponed until next week. Not that Severus nor James needed the extra time. They both finished their homework a few days ago.

He and his classmates ended up spending the rest of the night exchanging stories in the common room. A few older students actually joined them at one point, regaling some of the funniest and most scandalous rumors they heard from their batchmates. Severus never had anyone tell him such stories before, considering he didn't have that many friends older than him growing up. It was new and a little dishonorable, but Severus couldn't bring himself to stop listening, especially when a 5th-year student narrated a rather shocking report about the little tantrum Bellatrix Black performed at the Malfoy Yule Ball. No one actually knew the reason behind it but they said the oldest Black sister was screaming at her parents about protecting her sister. They just all assumed it was about Andromeda's recent falling out from her parents. Severus wondered if Bellatrix Black was actually pertaining to the youngest sister. If she truly was, then it begs the question of what they should protect Narcissa from.

Too bad their little storytime ended before Severus could further question it. It was already past bedtime, reasoned the older students. If Severus had to guess, they only said it so they could start talking about other, more steamy discussions. The young Prince heir didn't want to hear them anyway so he stood with his classmates and headed to bed. He was so tired, that the moment he finished brushing his teeth and changing into his nightclothes, he promptly drifted off to sleep.

The next morning was similarly rowdy. Obviously, the students aren't sick of classes yet.

James, like usual, had come in for breakfast a bit later than Severus. What's surprising, however, was that Sirius was walking beside him. Severus saw his betrothed nod to the Black heir and skip towards the Ravenclaw table with an easy grin.

"What in bloody Merlin's name were you doing with *him?"* Lily growled from beside him, startling Severus and causing their other classmates to either snicker or nod their agreements.

James just smiled at Lily as if the girl hadn't just growled at him and sat opposite of them. "Hello to you, too, Lils. Good morning, Sev," the Potter heir greeted happily.

Severus returned the greeting, albeit minus the grin. “What *were* you doing with Sirius, James?”

“Oh, that,” started James with a small shake of his head. “He apologized to me last night. We talked for a bit and came to an understanding. I can’t say we’re back to being best friends but it’s something at least.”

“So you just forgave him for everything he said about Severus?” Poppy asked in aghast.

Severus wanted to point out he stopped caring about that weeks ago, but James was quick to respond, “Of course not! I told him he had to apologize to Sev as well, or I wouldn’t want to be friends with him.”

“Really?” Severus’s eyes widened, forgetting his initial annoyance at being talked over.

James raised a brow like it was the most obvious thing in the world. For James, it really was. There was no way he’d remain friends with someone who had a problem with the person he’s going to spend his whole life with. That’s just not something he can ignore. “He said he plans on apologizing to you. I’m not sure when but I’d rather you not be alone when that happens,” said James, instead of answering the younger boy.

“I’ll stay with him *all day,* ” Lily promised vehemently, as did Max beside her.

“That’s not necessary,” argued Severus, hating the fact that he had to be constantly guarded.

James pursed his lips. “Oh, but it is,” he insisted. “He hurt you once with his words. He can do it again. Would you prefer I be the one to follow you around? Because you know I will.”

Severus sighed helplessly, “Fine.”

With that matter finished, the discussion turned to a less serious note. Pun intended. Because it was still early and classes won’t start for another hour, no one was actually in a hurry to leave the table. Max and Poppy even ended up playing Wizarding Chess with Lily watching on the side with a horrified expression.

Severus and James, on the other hand, were stuck in a debate with Poppy and Remus (who sat with them after finishing his own breakfast over at the Gryffindor table) about the superiority of Exploding Snap over Gobstones.

Their little arguments were cut off when Max shrieked on his seat. One of the owls delivering letters had somehow landed on top of their chess board. The little pieces had even attacked the poor owl before Poppy cut the game off. Severus felt bad for laughing at the scene. James was less so.

“Hey, Lily! This is for you,” Max announced when he finally picked up the letter in front of him. He immediately handed it to her, obviously wanting to go back to their game.

“Who’s it from?” Asked Poppy nonchalantly while letting Max deal with their pieces.

Lily didn’t answer and instead kept reading the letter with concentration. By her expressions alone, it was clear that the letter didn’t have the best of news. They all waited for her to finish reading so they could ask what’s wrong.

“Oh no,” Lily muttered as she reached the end of the letter from her parents.

“What is it? Has something happened?” Severus asked concernedly. He didn’t like to think about his friend receiving bad news. He remembered the time when he found out about his mother’s death and hoped Lily won’t go through the same pain he did.

Lily shook her head sadly and tucked the letter inside her pocket. “It’s from mum. I asked her to write to me if she heard news about our neighbor. A few days before coming back here, one of our neighbors was arrested for hurting his pregnant wife. They took her to the hospital and I only got to visit once with mum and dad. Mum said she and the baby didn’t make it. I was so excited about the baby,” Lily shared tearfully. “Mum was constantly worried about her. She said a

girl like Sandra shouldn't be with the likes of her husband. Mr. Snape is always drunk and scares me and my sister whenever he passes by our house. She was so nice to me and scolded the other kids in our street when they're being mean. I'm going to miss her. I hope Mr. Snape stays in jail forever," she added.

"I'm very sorry, Lily," Severus said softly. The others did so as well. Lily nodded her thanks and spent the rest of the time subdued. Even though the person, Mrs. Snape was only his friend's neighbor, Lily really must have liked her.

He thought about the man, Mr. Snape, and how evil he must be to kill his own wife and child. It was the same thing his mother once told her when she was still alive. Something he almost forgot until that very moment— that not all people are meant to be parents. Severus was old enough to finally understand what his mother meant when Severus used to ask about his father. If his father was anything like Mr. Snape, then Severus was glad not to have met him.

When he and James ever have children in the future, Severus would make sure they're going to be loved and cared for like he and James are loved by theirs.

True to Sirius's promise to James, the young Black heir approached the Prince heir in the library just before dinner. James wasn't around but Severus had a feeling he didn't really know when Sirius planned on apologizing. If he did, Severus was certain the hazel-eyed boy would be right beside him staring his once-best friend down.

Severus wasn't really sure whether he should be surprised that Sirius actually came up to him or feel happy for a small hope that James won't have to choose between their betrothal and his friendship with Sirius. He was just glad his faith in Sirius's loyalty to James hadn't failed him.

Sirius was seated opposite of Severus, Lily, and Max— both of whom refused to leave Severus's side. Thankfully, being they're in the library, Severus was almost assured there would be no screaming in his near future.

"Speak, Black," ordered Lily menacingly. Severus had to bite his cheek to refrain from snorting or giggling. It was funny seeing Pureblood Black intimidated by Muggleborn Evans.

"I just… I want to apologize, I guess," Sirius muttered quietly without letting their gazes meet.

"You guess?" Severus had to clarify. Even though he does not mean to be unreasonable and unforgiving, he won't let others step all over him. He needed to be sure Sirius Black really meant his apology before he even thinks about giving him a second chance.

Black shook his head fiercely. "No, no. I do want to apologize."

Severus hummed and gestured with his hand kindly for the older boy to go on. Black let out a huge breath before finally lifting his head to face the onyx-eyed boy. The trio didn't even notice that Black actually held a sheet of crumpled parchment in his fist until the boy straightened it in front of them. Their surprise increased when Black started reading it.

"I don't know where to start, honestly. I thought about simply saying sorry to you but I don't think you would have appreciated that, so I wrote this instead hoping I won't forget to apologize for a lot of things. First, I want to apologize for what I said on the train the first time we met. I was disrespectful to your privacy. They were right. I should not have said anything without your consent. I'm working on honoring boundaries, though. And I guess this is the first step, I think?

"Second, I'm sorry for getting mad every time James chooses to sit with you at the Ravenclaw table during breakfast. I got jealous and blamed you for taking away James from me. Third, I'm sorry about ignoring you most times we're in the same area. I didn't even notice that until Remus told me. And lastly… I'm really sorry about what I said before the holidays. It was cruel and mean and downright nasty. I felt bad the moment I said it and instead of apologizing, I ran away. I'm sorry, Prince. I really am. I hope you can still give me another chance to prove I'm not as mean as everyone thinks I am."

Severus gaped the whole time Black spoke. He expected some short apology about what happened last month and an excuse, and then some insisting on them being friends. He didn't expect the admission of jealousy and the assurance of learning boundaries. He didn't expect Black to apologize for the train incident when he announced his ability as bearer without his consent, and apologizing for the things even Severus didn't know such as him being mad about James at the Ravenclaw table.

"That… That was very nice of you, Black," commented Severus softly.

The boy shrugged a shoulder and smiled shyly before explaining, "I spent the holidays with Uncle Alphard. He said a lot of things that made me think."

"I'm glad," replied Severus with a brighter smile. "I accept your apology, Black. And please, call me Severus."

Max and Lily, both more cautious than Severus nodded apprehensively and offered for him to call them by their first names too. Provided he doesn't hurt Severus again.

When James heard about the in-depth apology and Severus's subsequent forgiveness, he pulled Severus in for a tight hug. No one had to say it out loud but everyone knew James was relieved he didn't have to lose his first friend in Hogwarts.

Chapter 21 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/26988715/chapters/92036428)

Notes:

ugh. I just went on a trip with my friends this week. made me realize they all have girlfriends or boyfriends while here I am, writing fanfictions...

here's a chapter for you all 🤷

"Not all those who wander are lost."
—The Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkein

The next few weeks flew by relatively calm. Apart from the flying classes, Severus still excelled in most of his academics. Professor Slughorn even gave him an invitation for his *Slug Club* which, for starters, was supposedly for fourth-year students and above. Severus decided he wouldn't be attending anyway. He didn't want to be the only younger student in the group. He had enough attention on him already.

On another note, his tentative friendship with Sirius Black after his lengthy apology proved better than Severus expected. When the young Black heir isn't fuming with jealousy, he's rather funny and kind. Sirius sat with them at the Ravenclaw table one morning and didn't stop. It amused him constantly to see Lily blush every time Sirius smiled at her. If he had to guess, his friend is obviously crushing on the black-haired second year.

Severus also noticed Sirius started smiling at his brother more and more. He had no idea if the two brothers talked things over but James said he stopped complaining about the younger Black being sorted into Slytherin. Severus wanted to meet the uncle Sirius said he'd been staying with during the holidays. If that man managed to talk some sense into a boy like Sirius, then he must be one heck of a wizard.

However, it didn't mean Sirius and Severus suddenly became the best of friends. They actually don't talk a lot even when in the same group. They never even had a one-on-one discussion yet.

So, when Sirius came to his rescue one free afternoon, of course, Severus was surprised.

He was heading back to the Ravenclaw tower after a quick detour to the kitchen when a second-year Hufflepuff came strutting towards him. He wasn't familiar with the boy but he'd seen him once or twice before in the hallways and the Great Hall. There's no reason whatsoever for the boy to approach him, which was why Severus felt uncomfortable when the Hufflepuff blocked his way up the stairs.

"I'm surprised to see you without one of your lapdogs trailing behind you, Prince," the sandy-haired Hufflepuff sneered.

Refusing to appear anything less than polite, Severus replied meekly, "I don't know what you mean. Please let me pass through."

The boy simply tsked and shook his head condescendingly. He stared at the Prince heir from head to toe and snorted as if he didn't like what he was seeing. Severus was becoming more and more agitated, so far as to consider using the emergency portkey attached to his bonding bracelet.

"I don't understand what everyone sees in you, Prince. You're not even that pretty. A fucking mudblood is what you are. Filthy half-blood posing as a bearer. You are an insult to the Pureblood society. No wonder mother and father are so disgusted when they heard about the Princes getting a half-blood heir. "Disgrace" spat the boy menacingly. "Honestly, Potter could do so much better than you."

Severus does not even know him. Hearing such angry words from a stranger felt like a knife piercing through his heart. He wondered if everyone else thinks of him the same way. He knew some hated him for being a half-blood and a bearer as if it was his fault.

He felt like crying but didn't want to give the boy more leverage. He gripped his wand firmly on his hand, forcing himself not to draw and curse the older boy. He's better than that, and he knows he's better than most at dueling. If he hexes him while angry, Severus is afraid he'll truly hurt him.

"I suggest you step away now," growled Severus. He might act so polite and proper but he's not one to let people talk so disrespectfully towards him.

The boy snorted. "And if I don't? What will a little Prince-*ess* like you do?"

"Nothing you will like, for sure," another voice drawled coldly from behind Severus.

Severus quickly jerked his head towards the new arrival and dropped his jaw when he found who the voice belonged to.

Sirius Black was standing in an offensive position, wand halfway drawn and directed at the Hufflepuff boy. He spared a glance at Severus as if checking for any injuries before turning his full attention to the wizard stupid enough to insult one of the most powerful heirs in Wizarding Britain. Not to mention, if James hears about this, there truly will be hell to pay.

Severus watched as Sirius tilted his head and glared at the Hufflepuff with a blank expression, giving off nothing to decipher. He knew then that Sirius trained in dueling like him. It was one of the first things they're taught: never to let the opponent read you.

"I knew you weren't smart, Smith, but I didn't think you'd be this stupid to make Prince an enemy," said Sirius in a bored tone.

Severus's brows raised, more because of finding out who the Hufflepuff was rather than what Sirius just said. He hadn't realized the Hufflepuff boy was a Smith. He was actually confused as to why the boy sneered at him for being half-blood when the Smiths aren't exactly known to be Pureblood supremacists. As far as he can remember from the anecdotes his grandfather shares, Zacharias Smith, the Head of the House, had always been against discrimination. He wondered why the old wizard's views didn't pass on to his grandson.

"What is it to you, Black?" spat Smith. "I thought you hated him as much. You know, the little speech you had weeks ago was so inspiring, actually."

Sirius shook his head slowly, unable to stop the guilt from churning in his stomach. "That's why I think you're so stupid, Smith."

Suddenly, Smith started laughing, causing both Severus and Sirius to squint their eyes in confusion.

"Oh, I get it! You want Prince for yourself, eh? Want a taste of this piece of *treasure*?" Smith cackled evilly.

If anyone asked Severus, he'd swear he didn't know who moved first. One moment Smith was laughing, the next he's thrown back to the cold floor. All their wands were drawn, but Sirius was able to tackle the Hufflepuff to the ground before anyone could yell out any curses and jinxes.

He wasn't sure who threw the first punch, but Severus had his galleons on Sirius. While he admits Smith deserved it, he didn't want Sirius to land in more trouble than he's in because of Severus.

"Sirius, stop it," Severus pulled Sirius off of the Hufflepuff. "He's not worth it!"

The fuming Black heir kicked Smith one last time before letting Severus pull him away. By that time, a few students were already gathered around them.

"What is the meaning of this?" Professor McGonagall bellowed among the crowd.

"Professor," started Severus, "I can explain."

The Scottish witch looked down at Severus and tutted, "I do hope so, Mr. Prince. The two of you, follow me," she gestured towards Severus and Sirius. "Ms. Howard, please accompany Mr. Smith to the infirmary."

The way to the Headmaster's office was filled with silence. Severus was wracked with part worry about the punishment, and part anger about having others save him again. He’s not some weak little damsel. He can very well take care of himself. Thank you very much.

Headmaster Dumbledore didn’t look very mad, at least, especially when Severus finished retelling the events. He seemed awfully disappointed but it wasn’t directed at the two of them. Either way, Sirius received a week-long detention for the fistfight while Severus got off scot-free because he hadn’t participated in it. Smith, on the other hand, will be suspended for a minimum of two weeks. The letter alone that will be sent to Lord Smith is enough punishment for the second year Hufflepuff. Severus can’t imagine how angry Lord Smith might be, considering he and Lord Prince are well acquainted.

The moment they stepped out of the Headmaster’s office, James, Lily, Remus, Max, Amelia, John, and even Regulus were all waiting for them by the stairs. The Potter heir was quick to approach the duo and pulled Severus in for a tight hug.

“Merlin, Severus! I was so worried!” muttered James into Severus’s neck. Severus returned the hug with similar ferocity, basking in the concern and care of his best friend and intended. "We had Defense when it happened. I'm so glad Sirius had to go to the bathroom. We ran here as soon as class ended."

“I’m fine, James. I wasn’t even fighting,” he assured the older boy. “Sirius punched Smith,” he added as an afterthought, the gentle smile on his face turning into a frown. He pulled away from the boy and turned to his recent savior.

“Why did you do that?” Severus asked, unable to hide the annoyance from his voice. “Sirius, you didn’t have to punch him. I can handle him myself. I’m not some… some *little princess!”*

"Hey!" chorused the two girls in the group, probably once having such dreams to be one. Severus sent them an apologetic look, mouthing a quick *sorry.*

"I know you're not," answered Sirius calmly, "but Smith has gone too far. I'm not a good friend if I'd leave you to face him alone when I know I can help, Severus. Consider it penance for everything I did and said to you before."

"I've already forgiven you," insisted Severus, embarrassed to admit he almost whined.

Sirius shook his head, "You did, and thank you for that. Still, it doesn't sit right with me to let Smith say all those *things* to you. You are my friend, of course, I'll help out."

"What did he say, exactly?" James interrupted with a scowl. His hand holding onto Severus's wrist tightened a fraction.

"Nothing worth repeating," said Severus with finality.

James and the rest of the group obviously wanted to protest but one fierce look from the young heir stopped them. Severus didn't want to say it and they should respect his decision. Little did he know Sirius will spill them word for word the moment they reach their dorm room. No one messes with Severus Ariston Prince, the boy Sirius came to see as a little brother in a short time.

And if Jonathan Smith had to suffer unfortunate flatulence every time he says the word 'pureblood', then no one can fault James and Sirius for laughing.

It was the talk of the whole school for a whole week. Many were disgusted by Smith's blatant disrespect to Severus, especially because everyone who met the young Prince heir knew how polite and kind the boy was. Some of the Purebloods even approached him and assured him they don't share Smith's views. It was a small gesture, but it soothed Severus's worries a whole lot.

James became more overprotective than ever, glaring at everyone who looks at Severus wrong. Severus probably scolded him at least ten times the first day alone. Not to mention, when his Grandfather, Papa, and brother heard about the incident, it took Severus three-foot-long of pleading with them not to storm Hogwarts. His Grandfather assured him Jonathan Smith, the Hufflepuff, will be properly disciplined by Lord Smith, who was mortified by the actions of his heir. As it turns out, Jonathan had taken his parents' words wrongly when he heard them talk about the blood status of the Prince heir. Both Mr. and Mrs. Smith sent him apology letters explaining they never thought of Severus as disgusting as Jonathan implied. It had been a private conversation, they said, when they talked about how disgusting a certain old widower was to pursue a marriage inquiry to the young Prince heir. Jonathan must have heard the words 'disgusting' and 'Prince heir' and made his conclusion. Like Augustus, they assured him Jonathan's actions will be properly corrected.

Severus certainly appreciated their apologies and explanations but it was still embarrassing that everyone seemed to know about the incident. Severus knows it's not something he can control, yet it still irks him why everyone finds his life so interesting. The best he could do was ignore them. It did help that he spends most of his time around James and their friends, and he rarely hears people talk about it.

The only good thing that came out of the Smith incident was that Regulus and Sirius finally fixed their relationship. Helping Severus was the final push Regulus needed to forgive his brother. Their home life will probably still be complicated at best but at least they can have the school year to bond away from the watchful eyes of their severe mother.

Thankfully, all the talk about Smith, Sirius, and Severus died down when two of the Gryffindor sixth-years accidentally got lost in the Forbidden Forest a little over two months into school. Everyone's attention was diverted.

Weeks passed and everything seemed normal again. Smith never bothered Severus for a second time, although the Hufflepuff tends to avoid him anyway, especially with James looming beside him all the time.

He mostly devoted his time to his schoolwork. If he wasn't with his friends or spending leisure time by the lake with James, Severus could be found with his head buried over books and parchments. Even in the Ravenclaw community, he's kind of a swot. Luckily, no one truly faults him for it, for everyone has come to accept that Severus Prince is a sucker for knowledge. It helps though that Severus can regularly be found helping his classmates (and some older students) with their homework.

He still excelled in most of his classes except Flying, and unfortunately, Transfiguration. He's not doing badly, per se, just that he does better in DADA and Potions. In fact, by the time the end-of-the-year exams came, it wasn't a surprise that he was one of the students who didn't end up cramming all the information in one night. Ironically, the night before the exam, Severus was found reading a muggle fiction book. Regardless, he still did so well that a few days before the last day of the school year, Professor Slytherin made him stay after class.

"Is something the matter, Professor?" asked Severus concernedly, clearly thinking he must have done something wrong or failed the test.

Professor Slytherin smiled and gestured for Severus to sit on the closest desk. "No, of course, not, Mr. Prince. But there is something I want to talk to you about. Nothing bad, I assure you."

Severus hesitated before nodding once, and waited for the DADA Professor to continue.

"First of all, I wanted to congratulate you for having the highest grade in DADA in your year. I'm not one to admit this, but frankly, I am astounded by your capabilities, both in theory and practice. I've never seen someone so in control of their magic at such a young age."

A blush rose onto the boy's cheek as he shyly thanked the adult. Although, he just wished that that same level of control in his magic could be applied to his flying and transfiguration skills.

"With that, I am offering to tutor you during the summer vacation. You, and Mr. Potter both, who also got the highest grade in DADA for his year. I have already talked to him about this earlier today. I plan to write to Lord Prince and Lord Potter about the offer but I wanted to know if you are comfortable with the arrangement first before I do so," said Professor Slytherin.

To say that Severus was flattered was a bit of an understatement. Professor Tom Slytherin is known to be one of the best dueling masters in all of Europe, especially with Headmaster Dumbledore as his foster father and mentor. To be taken under his tutelage would be, to put it mildly, a chance in a million.

"Yes, yes, of course!" answered Severus abruptly, unable to keep himself from sitting as he jumped off his chair in his excitement. His old dueling tutor, Niko's maternal uncle, would be happy to hear the news if things do go as Severus hoped. The wizard had been worried about his apparently new full-time job, as it would mean he had to recommend a new tutor for the Prince heir. The Professor's offer couldn't come at a much nicer time.

"Splendid, Mr. Prince. Mr. Potter had the same reaction as well, albeit louder than you are," responded the wizard with a smile. "I will write to both Lord Prince and Lord Potter tonight then. Off you go."

Grinning like a child in a Dragon Reserve, Severus bid the professor a heartfelt thank you and goodbye to head to the next class. He didn't quite expect the offer but felt very fortunate for the opportunity. It's not exactly uncommon for the professors at Hogwarts to take in private tutoring during the break. Professor Flitwick usually chooses the one needing the most help in his classes. Professor McGonagall is known to take in witches who have an affinity for Transfiguration. Even Professor Kettleburn offers two or three students a year summer apprenticeships in Care of Magical Creatures.

However, Professor Slytherin had never taken in a student in his 4 years in his position, as far as Severus knows. Everybody knows the tall and regal wizard is kept busy by conventions and travels during the break. He's in the papers

regularly enough for helping catch a criminal or break famous curses all over and outside the country.

Severus can already imagine what James must have felt. Between the two of them, James hero-worshipped the DADA Professor more. He's one of the many reasons his betrothed wants to be an Auror or a Curse-breaker someday. Besides, the mere fact that they'll both be training under the same tutor at the same time will definitely make James happy.

True enough, when dinner came, James immediately hounded Severus to gush about Professor Slytherin's offer. None of his friends knew yet. Severus wanted to wait until he receives a reply from his grandfather. James's friends, on the other hand, knew about it instantly.

No matter, Severus didn't wait for Augustus Prince's reply for very long. He received a short missive from the Head of the House informing him that he received Professor Slytherin's letter and that he accepted a meeting with the wizard to discuss the matter. It was as much of an affirmation as Severus can get from his grandfather. If Lord Prince truly had even an inch of insight that the Professor would hurt him or James, he wouldn't have scheduled to meet the wizard at all.

Suffice to say, Severus could hardly wait for the summer break.

Instead of heading to the Potter Manor for lunch like they did last Yule break, Augustus and Severus flooed straight home. There's a surprise for him, his grandfather said. Severus secretly hoped it was a copy of the limited edition Incredible Poisons & Potions book by Bartholomew Craftwood released a week ago. He wanted to order it by owl using his allowance but because it came out the last week of the school year, Severus didn't have enough galleons left. He blamed the upper-class Ravenclaws for enticing them with sweets they bought and sold from Honeydukes.

However, what greeted him in the parlor of the manor was so much better.

"Niko!" cried Severus happily, dropping his satchel on the floor and barrelling into the teen.

Niko ruffled his hair and hugged him tightly. "Blessed be Athena, you've grown an inch again, *bambi,"* exclaimed the Greek prince fondly.

"Have not," came the boy's reply, muffled by the robes his face was smushed into. "It's only half. I checked."

"Severus, please don't leave your belongings on the floor," chastised Lord Prince. Severus immediately pulled back and grinned sheepishly at his grandfather before promptly picking up his satchel. "I suppose you rather like your surprise?" Augustus asked with a smile.

Severus nodded his head widely. "Is Papa here, too?" He asked.

"Nah," replied Niko. "He's quite busy right now but he wants me to tell you he misses you dearly and will come visit as soon as he can."

The youngest boy was obviously disappointed but it didn't stop him from expressing his excitement and joy that his brother was around.

Severus opened his mouth to ask another question but was interrupted by his grandfather. "I suggest you finish your discussion in the Drawing Room? I'll have Mipsy serve you cookies and iced tea."

Severus beamed and nodded enthusiastically. Mipsy's cookies are the best. He missed it dearly when he's at school.

The two young wizards raced their way to the room, laughing and ignoring the older wizard's admonishment. Even though Nikolaus was already nearing 16, he never minded acting childishly alongside his younger brother.

Severus took off his coat and draped it across the settee, sighing loudly when he settled comfortably in one of the soft armchairs. Niko did the same opposite of where Severus was seated.

“How long are you staying?” the younger boy asked, the wide smile still plastered on his face.

Niko frowned, absentmindedly picking on the invisible lints off his pants as he answered, “I don’t know yet, honestly. Perhaps for the whole summer. We’ve been receiving those threats again. It’s getting quite annoying.”

The statement had Severus sit up straight in a matter of seconds. “Again?” He asked in concern.

Niko nodded sadly. “Dad was attacked at work about a week ago. Don’t worry, he’s fine. The Royal Guards disarmed them in time. He sent me to stay here until things die down again since school ended a few days ago. The public does not know of our connection with the House of Prince so it seems unlikely they’ll find me here. I think they finally figured out who sent all those hitmen years ago.”

Both boys were subdued. The implication was clear. If they catch whoever ordered the hit on Prince Alexios and his son, that would mean Severus’s mother can finally get the justice she deserved. No matter that Eileen Prince wasn't their target, she was still caught in a crossfire they started. Severus knew his brother and Papa had always felt it was their fault that Severus lost his mum— not that they both said anything to him or to each other. They always get choked up and look at him with guilt whenever she comes up in a conversation. Try as he might, Severus couldn't convince them well enough that he never blamed them for what happened.

“Will Papa be fine?” Severus finally asked after a moment, voice still laced with worried apprehension.

The teenager moved swiftly from his seat and knelt right in front of the younger boy. Nikolaus grabbed onto Severus’s hands and held it firmly in between his bigger ones. “Look at me, Severus,” urged Nikolaus softly, “Dad will be fine. He’s got Leon with him. You know how strong and protective he is. He’ll come to visit soon, I know it. Do not worry your little head.”

“I’m not little anymore, Niko,” griped Severus, nearly offended at the word choice if not for the soothing tone his brother used.

That made Nikolaus smile. Severus never did change, thankfully. Five years and he still couldn’t understand that he’ll always be the adorable 5-year-old hiding behind his father’s leg in Niko’s eyes. The Prince pushed himself off the ground and ruffled Severus’s hair. “You’ll always be little to me, *bambi*.”

Without waiting for another affronted look from the boy, Nikolaus ungracefully plopped onto the bigger couch and grabbed a cookie from the plate on the coffee table. “Mipsy’s cookies are the best,” he moaned happily.

“The best,” seconded Severus.

Close (#)